

DAVID BLAKEMORE

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

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Q: Today is the 7th of November 1997. This is an interview with David Blakemore. This is being done on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training and I am Charles Stuart Kennedy. Let's kind of start at the beginning. Can you tell me when and where you were born and something about your family?

BLAKEMORE: I was born in Rochester, New York in 1941 the middle of three boys in the family. Neither of my parents had attended college. My father was a chain store manager and we moved around a lot. Rochester was one stop in a line of many.

Q: What kind of chain store was this?

BLAKEMORE: It was a five and ten. A competitor of Kresge and Murphy called Neisners, no longer in business. They had about 200 stores and were headquartered in Rochester. My mother, after the three boys got a little older, worked in a bank and became a mortgage manager in the bank. We moved to Pittsburgh in 1943, I think. We spent 6 years in Pittsburgh where my father managed a store. Six more years in Washington, DC, where my father was managing a store. We lived in Alexandria. That gets us up to 1955, I think. I spent one quick school year in Dearborn, Michigan, a suburb of Detroit, and then finally did my last two and a half years of high school back in the Rochester area, in East Rochester, New York.

Q: During this time, what were your interests, particularly through high school?

BLAKEMORE: Sports certainly and music. I was always a good student. I was very interested in history, in particular, at school. No thought of being in the Foreign Service certainly at that time and no real interest, clear interest, in foreign affairs that I can recall. That came later at the college level.

Q: How about reading? What kind of books did you like to read?

BLAKEMORE: Fiction. Definitely fiction and history, biographies.

Q: What sort of type of fiction? Do any books stand out in your mind?

BLAKEMORE: I don't know from what years exactly but I can remember great favorite of mine was the Zane Grey classic *The Last Trail*.

Q: He was a western writer.

BLAKEMORE: Right. I read it from cover to cover so often.

Q: Do you have any desire to go out west and be a cowboy or something?

BLAKEMORE: No, actually I don't know a lot about Zane Grey beyond that one book. That book was *Appalachian frontier*. It wasn't about cowboys at all. It was really frontiersmen settling the area of Kentucky and Tennessee as I recall.

Q: You graduated from Rochester High School?

BLAKEMORE: East Rochester High School.

Q: What was East Rochester like as a place?

BLAKEMORE: It is a fascinating little town I think. There may be 10,000 people and one high school. It had gotten its start in the late 19th century as a New York Central car shops. Car shops meaning a place where railroad cars were built, wooden cars. That brought a lot of Italian immigrant wood workers to the area. It gave the town a very Italian flavor which is still very much there. Then the presence of the wood workers attracted a piano works to use the wood workers skills to build pianos. Those are the two foundations of the area industrially. We used to say when I was in high school, I graduated in 1958, that it was quite possible to live in that town without speaking English. If you spoke Italian you really could do everything you wanted to do. Of course you couldn't go to school in those days in any language but English but if you were past school age it was very possible to be only an Italian speaker and survive.

Q: Did you find yourself absorbing sort of the Italian food and awhile you were there?

BLAKEMORE: I kind of regret that I didn't do more of that. I think the food yes, that certainly made an impression on me. It is a long lasting affinity of mine for Italian food. But really no, I didn't do much beyond that. I don't know why.

Q: You graduated from high school in '58. Where did you go to college?

BLAKEMORE: I went to Valparaiso University in the northwest corner of Indiana. It is about 50 miles from Chicago. I went there because it is a Lutheran affiliated school and my family was, and I am still an active Lutheran. It was a school of about 2,500 at the most, at the time that I was there. I wasn't certain of course about the quality of the education when I was there. I had no basis for comparison but I often felt later in the Foreign Service that I had not missed anything in terms of the quality of education with colleagues that had gone to schools with names a lot more famous. I went there with the intention of majoring in history. After the first year I began to think about career possibilities for a history major beyond teaching school. It seemed to me that history was fairly limited in that sense. I couldn't really envision myself doing anything with a history degree except teaching. I was pretty sure that I didn't want to teach which is ironic because now I think of myself as a person who has enjoyed the teaching opportunities that I have had in the Foreign Service and elsewhere. That was not going to be active enough for me to be a teacher I decided so what should I do?

Without a lot of thought I became a government major. It was not called political science because the head of the department was contemptuous of the idea that there was anything even vaguely scientific about this field of his, so it was government. It embraced international relations as well as domestic government. It was in that way that I got a little more oriented towards international affairs. Even then I did not really have a vision of the Foreign Service. I certainly had not met anybody who had been in the Foreign Service. I could not have given you at all an accurate picture of what a Foreign Service officer might do. But it sounded exciting and romantic to live overseas so I took the Foreign Service exam, the written exam, when I was a senior in college, in Chicago I took it, and passed the exam. I had an oral exam scheduled.

But then, those were the bountiful days of the federal government passing out lots of money to go to graduate school. Something called National Defense Education Act fellowships were around. The way those worked was that they were assigned to various graduate schools. For example I learned that the American University Graduate School had five of these wonderful National Defense Education Act fellowships in their grant to give to students in the area of South and Southeast Asian studies. It was an area that I knew absolutely nothing about. I had taken one course in it, in international relations and international politics of Southeast Asia, as I recall.

Q: Had you seen "South Pacific?"

BLAKEMORE: Well, yes. I appreciate your effort to help me, but there is no way that this can be turned into a rational decision. The money was there. I had wonderful fond memories of Washington from the six years that I lived in Alexandria from grade three to grade nine. The thought of coming back was very attractive. I had friends who were going to come back here to work or to go to graduate school also so I applied for one of those grants and got it. It was a three year grant. The amount of money isn't relevant any more because it sounds so small but it was enough to actually live on. Tuition was waived. I could live on it. Not royally but I could live on it for three years.

I decided to put the idea of the Foreign Service on the shelf which was fine. What wasn't fine was that I didn't tell the State Department that and just failed to show up for the oral exam. More on that later.

I spent two years here in Washington at American University studying South and Southeast Asia. My emphases were India and Indonesia, really Indonesia which I have still never been to or seen any part of it. After two years, in the middle of which I got married, I decided that I really wasn't a student. Again I was on this narrow path towards teaching which I did not want to do. I was not doing well. It was a weird Ph.D. program because you could take some comprehensives and get a masters sort of incidentally on the way. I flunked, I think, one comprehensive so that wasn't going to happen.

I took the Foreign Service written test again and passed it with a considerably better grade. I guess I got all the questions about Indonesia and India right the second time around. I then had an oral exam in the old civil service building in Washington. It was a little different in those days than it is now. A little more subjective, I think it is fair to say. There was a panel of three Foreign Service officers, I think two men and a woman. I don't know where they got that woman in those days. She must have been doing a lot of exams. The first thing they asked me when I walked in was whether my mother had taught me any manners and if I wasn't going to keep an appointment, wasn't it appropriate to tell somebody? I was really off-balance during the oral exam. Then the deal was, you'd answer the questions to the best of your ability. Again it was very different because in those days a lot of the questions were substantive. They were looking for knowledge.

Q: I had given both. Do you remember any of the questions that you were asked?

BLAKEMORE: No.

Q: Any problem solving ones?

BLAKEMORE: They may have been subtly looking at my problem solving skills but I didn't notice it. It seemed to me it was as much a search for knowledge as the written exam had been. The drill was that I was asked to excuse myself while they talked about me. I could hear them, their raised voice through the walls. I thought that at the very least there was some controversy here. They called me back in and the chairman said we have decided to give you a passing grade, or whatever the buzz word was, but we find you very supercilious and we would like to warn you that in the Foreign Service you will run into some people that are even smarter than you. It came as quite a shock to me, this good news and bad news arrangement. That was that. That was in the summer of 1964 when the Vietnam war was becoming more and more active. I came into the Foreign Service in a class on April 1st, April Fools Day in 1965.

Q: Can you characterize the class?

BLAKEMORE: Despite my appearance of superciliousness, I found the class quite daunting, formidable in terms of where people had gone to school and how articulate they were and the experiences they had had overseas. In some cases they knew why they wanted to be in the Foreign Service and knew what embassies were about. I think I was fairly quiet for a while and then of course made some good friends. The class size was I think just over 30. I can remember three or four women out of that 30. One of those women was a USIS officer. The people in the class were considerably younger than is the case now. It was not all that uncommon for people to be right out of undergraduate school or at least right out of graduate school as I was, half of graduate school. I would guess the average age was well under 30 which is quite different from now. I don't know what percentage were married. I think maybe half. We developed pretty good camaraderie during the course of the A100 orientation training. As I think is still the case, on the last day of the training we were told what our assignments were. I don't recall having a chance to express an opinion about what I would prefer.

Q: I think right at the beginning maybe when you first came in. I was asked on the telephone before I even came into the Foreign Service to give three posts. I had just run up three stairs to get the phone in the boarding house. I think I came out with Paris, London and Bonn, or something like that.

BLAKEMORE: I don't remember. Maybe that is unfair, maybe they did ask where we wanted to go. Going to Vietnam was a very significant possibility at that time at least for the single guys because State Department officers were being drafted to serve as district representatives, political advisors in rural Vietnam. We had a worst post pool. Everybody put in a dollar which would go to the person who had the worst assignment, based on what criteria I can't imagine. When the assignments were all made public, we decided to divide the proceeds of the worst post pool between the woman who was assigned to Belize and the guy, who is a good friend of mine, who was assigned to Jeddah.

I was assigned to Calcutta. Then in good State Department fashion, to get off language probation, I studied French. My years of literary French from high school and college, after about five months, were transformed into the ability to speak French reasonably well. Then they sent me to Calcutta and I never have been in a French speaking country except as a tourist. The accomplishment of actually being able to think and deal in a foreign language was something I was quite proud of, but now it's gone. All I can tell you is that it is almost entirely gone.

Q: You were in Calcutta from when to when just by years?

BLAKEMORE: My wife and I arrived in Calcutta in November 1965 and left there in November 1966, one year.

Q: How did Calcutta strike you when you arrived there?

BLAKEMORE: We were appalled. Neither one of us had been out of the United States except to Canada. We had no awareness at an emotional level, perhaps at an intellectual level, but not at an emotional level of how serious poverty can be. The oppressive poverty and the heat, humidity and the dirt of India really was something that we were not prepared for and we both went into kind of an emotional tail spin for a while. As we were coming out of that, after a year of getting our feet on the ground and adjusting, we were transferred. Which is too bad.

Q: When you were in Calcutta during this year, what were the political currents in India at that particular time.

BLAKEMORE: It was an interesting time, I guess everybody says that. Domestically this was the year in which Prime Minister Shastri died at a summit meeting in Tashkent with the Soviet leadership. Indira Gandhi came from nowhere and was elected as Prime Minister of India. It was exciting to watch happen. On the international side the Indian moral superiority established by Nehru was still in full swing. The Vietnam war and our participation in it was extremely unpopular in India and there were regular demonstrations in front of the consulate general in Calcutta and I'm sure elsewhere in India against U.S. involvement in that war. Those were a little frightening too although they would not be to me now having seen demonstrations elsewhere, but again I had never seen that sort of thing. We lived near the consulate, right next door. It was kind of scary at first. You got used to it as it was something that happened fairly regularly.

Q: Did you have much contact with Indians? You were there such short time.

BLAKEMORE: Not as much as I would have liked to have. Because the experience of living overseas and interacting with foreigners was so new, the really useful contact with Indians came in the consulate general with the Indian staff. Of course they are in a sense "tame" Indians. They were experienced American handlers but I developed a great fondness for several Indian employees at the consulate.

I was on a rotational assignment meaning that I was supposed to spend my two years in Calcutta moving around from one section to the other: consular, economic, political and admin. I started in consular and I was the only consular officer. Calcutta was still a fairly active port at that time and the United States still had a merchant marine. There were some challenging seamen in trouble cases.

Q: Can you give an example or do any cases stick in mind?

BLAKEMORE: I don't really remember a lot of detail. Nothing really romantic or anything. The seamen cases were all new to me and also there were a lot of young Americans wandering aimlessly around South Asia.

Q: It was part of the life in those days. They could get out and go to smoke pot and have a good time for a year.

BLAKEMORE: The hippie-type people. They were interested in Indian religions, fascinated by them. The Indians were extremely tolerant as long as the young people stayed out of trouble, stayed away from criminal activity.

The senior Indian consular employee was a real life saver for me because despite what I thought was a very well done consular course here in the training in Washington, I didn't know what I was doing in interpreting consular regulations. If it had been Manila and I had been doing non-immigrant visas then there would have been a boring sameness to it but I would have gotten familiar with a relatively small body of regulations that applied. But I was doing immigrant visas, non-immigrant visas, welfare and whereabouts, protection of American citizens, seamen and shipping. All that was on my plate ostensibly. I would make ad hoc decisions: here is what we are going to do. The senior FSN would say okay, nodding his head from side to side and walk off. He would come back a few minutes later and say "you know, you might want to look at what it says in the regulations." He would draw me back from the brink yet again. He was a wonderful guy. That was kind of a scary experience, but it was a good experience and there were no major catastrophes.

Q: Who was consul general?

BLAKEMORE: Bill Hitchcock.

Q: How did he operate?

BLAKEMORE: He was very democratic I would say. He and his wife were interested in our welfare as young people in the Service. As I think about it, he maintained a pretty good balance between a certain aloofness required for good leadership and a lot of interaction with everybody. His deputy, Bernie Korgan, whom my wife worked for as a secretary, was terrific and had very much a mentor mentality. He and his wife took us under their wing and took very good care of us socially and in helping us understand what we were dealing with. They helped us deal with the culture shock and depression that went with it. It was a very nice feeling in the office.

Q: How does one operate in a place? I am talking about you are now in sort of the mental health field anyway, but looking back on that (I have never served in a Calcutta-type place) I would think that ones reaction would be to almost reject it and go to the polo playing set or the other one would be to go into acute depression. For an American this must be very difficult.

BLAKEMORE: We thought it was difficult, and there is no question we were both depressed. One of my reactions was to drink more than I normally did and more than I should have. My wife spent a lot of time shut up in the apartment for the first few months, not really venturing out to do much. It was a tricky time and, as I say, we were beginning to come out of it. We traveled some in northern India and we made some friends who worked for USIA in Delhi. We took the train across northern India to Delhi and met them and then drove with them to Srinagar in Kashmir. It was a wonderful trip and we began to see beyond the poverty and the dirt to the fabulous richness in this culture and to get in touch with some of that: to visit temples and to appreciate some Indian art, both modern and not so modern, even Indian music. We ran out of time.

Q: Why were you moved so quickly?

BLAKEMORE: Let me just finish what I did while I was there. The consular section took up seven months of the year then a permanent replacement came and I moved on to the political section during the election and covered four states in northeastern India during the election. I never got to the area. It's odd, it is sort of a blank in my memory, how little interaction I had with Indian politicians and Indian people at least during the consular phase of my work. It was pretty much an in-the-office job which is very puzzling to me now. How do you do political work in the office? All the people in my class who were on rotational assignments were what was called central complement. That meant that they were extra gift employees for the post. The post didn't have to pay for us. We were paid for out of a Washington pool of money which dried up after about a year and nearly all of us were moved. It is a great example of the idiocy of government budgeting. Just because there is no more money in this pocket, you spend a tremendous amount of money from another pocket to move everybody. The expense of moving is so great. Anyway, that is what happened. Most of us were moved within the geographic bureau. I was in the Near East and South Asian bureau and we were moved from Calcutta to Jeddah.

When we arrived at the airport, there on the tarmac was my friend from the A100 course who had earned 17 dollars, or something, for having one of the worst posts. He was greatly amused that I had now joined him in Jeddah. At the time, and we are now talking about November 1966, it was the capital of Saudi Arabia and it was the city that tolerated and dealt with foreigners within Saudi Arabia. Nonetheless, it presented us with a new and interesting form of culture shock in the form of restrictions on our personal activity at post by the fundamentalist conservative monarch regime. For example, my wife could not drive. She could not go downtown in clothing that did not cover her arms entirely. Jeddah, if anything, was hotter than Calcutta and equally humid, which always surprises people, but it is right on the Red Sea. No alcohol. Of course, we had plenty of it but it wasn't publicly available. Christian services were conducted on the embassy grounds in a way that made us feel that we were participating in some evil clandestine activity. So as I say, it was another form of culture shock.

Q: You were there from about '66 to?

BLAKEMORE: July of '68 which is a year and a half.

Q: What was the political situation or the situation of Saudi Arabia at that time that you were there?

BLAKEMORE: It was a very autocratic system then. As far as I can see, things have not changed a whole lot though I haven't been back. King Faisal was certainly a benevolent dictator. A very sophisticated seeming and really gentle and wise man, I thought. I mention this personal characteristic because I think that attitude kind of pervaded the way the autocracy operated. It was not terribly repressive. There wasn't an awful lot of serious abuse of people, as long as they went by the rules, but there was not much tolerance for breaking the rules. There was, for an American certainly, a repressive air about the kingdom. It was a government that despite its conservatism, was extremely friendly with the United States.

At that time the Arabian American oil company, ARAMCO, was comprised of four American companies. It had not yet been expropriated. It wasn't puzzling that we had a very strong and friendly relationship with the Saudi government. Oil was priced at less than two dollars a barrel, a 42 gallon barrel of oil, but the ARAMCO production price was something like two cents a barrel. They were making a lot of money. The government was making a lot of money. This was long before the dramatic increase in prices.

We were in Jeddah during the 1967 Arab-Israeli War. It was a time when American embassies all over the Arab world were evacuated, sometimes under harrowing circumstances.

Q: There was the rumor in the Arab world that somehow or another Americans had destroyed the Egyptian air force.

BLAKEMORE: Right, I had forgotten about that and that made people quite unhappy. But the Saudi government saw what was happening in Libya (I remember Libya being one that was quite messy) and urged us not to evacuate people. They came to the ambassador, personal emissaries from the King showed up and I think the minister of the interior but I'm not certain. While he was in talking to the ambassador making his pitch that we not evacuate, his guard was sitting in the outer office with me, sabers and automatic weapons bristling like great desert warriors. We did not evacuate and there was really no unpleasantness directed at us at all in Jeddah.

The most important thing that happened to me in terms of my career there was that I was exposed to economic work for the first time. The embassy was experimenting with an unusual form of organization where there was a senior officer as the political counselor and another one as the economic counselor and then I think four or five of us junior people did both economic and political reporting. We would flip back and forth. At least they tried it that way and my friend, Tom Gallagher, who had been in the A100 class with me, was also in the bullpen as we called it. After this sort of brief effort at mixing everybody together, there was at least a de facto separation and Tom became the political junior officer and I was an economic junior officer.

I discovered that I loved economic work. I found it fascinating. I got to travel around the country a little bit and do amateurish assessments of the industrial development efforts in the various corners of Saudi Arabia. I learned a lot about the oil business although the main oil reporting took place from the consulate general in Dhahran on the Persian Gulf. Still, I had a chance to get involved in that. I learned a little bit about trade policy and I thought, I don't know where all this activity has been all my life but I really like it and would like to do more of it. I had only taken one economic course in undergraduate school. The Jeddah "bullpen" experience really affected the next 15 years of my career.

Q: How did you bring yourself up to speed on economics? There you are out in Saudi Arabia, what did you do?

BLAKEMORE: The economic counselor was a good teacher. What we were doing was a very shallow kind of economic journalism. We didn't have to know a whole lot about economics. Certainly nothing that would constitute analysis was done. From the counselor I learned enough about basic economic theory and forces. I certainly didn't know much but it didn't matter. It was not a very sophisticated economy of course at that time.

Q: Did you find yourself sort of working with ARAMCO?

BLAKEMORE: The major interaction with ARAMCO was done by the people in Dhahran. There was a very cooperative relationship and just a steady feeding of information of all kinds: production information, pricing information, market assessments and shipping and all the aspects of the oil business. There wasn't much refining going on at that time in the country. It was certain that they were sharing a lot more than the Saudi government would have liked them to share. It was just assumed that that would happen.

Q: How did you find the Saudi business, commercial, economic community? I was an economic officer for a year in Dhahran from '59 to '60 or so and I had the feeling that almost everything was being run by Palestinians at one level with a Saudi boss above them. What was your impression?

BLAKEMORE: That was my impression. Not only Palestinians but Lebanese and Egyptians to some extent. The Saudis that I encountered in economic work were all in the ministries. They did not seem terribly sophisticated about economics.

Q: The great influx of American educated Saudis was just getting cranked up at that time.

BLAKEMORE: Yes and I don't think they were going into business to a great extent. They found good opportunities in the government and I don't think had to work hard in general.

Q: Was there any concern at our embassy about whether Saudi Arabia, the economy, or the fact that so many other Arab countries had fallen to military coups, or something like that, was this a concern?

BLAKEMORE: Not a significant one, no. It seemed to us that the royal family was quite intelligent in the way it managed the potential for dissident activity in the country. There was certainly no terrorism of any kind in the oil fields or elsewhere while I was there. The religious right had to be gotten around, bowed to, but it wasn't anything like the force that it is today in Saudi and elsewhere. Not a major concern.

Q: While you were in the political section, were you getting any feeling for Nasser because he was sort of the great god for a while. Then after the '67 war, although he took the blame on himself, was there any feeling of the diminution of his stature at all? Did you get any feel for that?

BLAKEMORE: I don't recall that I did. Saudi Arabia was a very isolated place at that time. The issue that was so hard for them to deal with was the Jerusalem mosque [coming into] the hands of infidels.

Q: Which came about because of the '67 war.

BLAKEMORE: That's right. The loss of the West Bank and the rest of Jerusalem was a great blow to the Saudis in the religious sense rather than the political sense. I don't think the Saudis at that time particularly acknowledged Nasser's leadership in the Arab world, or at least leadership of them.

Q: Who was the ambassador at that time?

BLAKEMORE: Herman Eilts, a dynamo and a really amazing man. A fluent Arab speaker. Spoke English better than the queen. His mother tongue was German and so he spoke English beautifully but very carefully. He was extremely effective, friendly, accessible, and included the junior people in his staff meetings as a matter of course. He took me on two long driving trips around the country. He always took one of the junior officers. It was a wonderful experience to see the beauty of that country which is not really obvious from Jeddah.

Q: Did you get any feel for the Arabists versus the Israelists? This is one of the classic things. We have great interest mainly because of American political pressure in Israel and yet we have a lot more Arabs out there. This is your first time in there, did you get any feel for that tension?

BLAKEMORE: It was the first time that I had seen it. There were three well established Arabists in the embassy: Ambassador Eilts, Talcott Seeley was the DCM and later became the ambassador in Tunisia I recall, and Bob Stuckey was the political counselor. Seeley and the ambassador, if they had any significant concerns about how American policy was going, kept it to themselves. Stuckey I think it is fair to say couldn't. He was a very scholarly man. He loved to read Arabic texts and was well schooled in Arab literature as well as politics. I think our policy slant really made him feel bad. That is the recollection I have when you talk about it. He was really depressed and dismayed at the way American policy was going. He felt that the views of the Arabists were being brushed aside.

Q: How about getting statistics, economic information from the Saudis? Was this a problem?

BLAKEMORE: They didn't have a lot. The governor of the central bank was a Pakistani who was extremely cooperative and that is where the statistical base was in so far as there was one. The Saudis were not a particularly good source of information. We had the Pakistani in the bank on the one hand and the Americans at ARAMCO on the other and that is where the numbers came from. It was only later when I was assigned to Korea that I saw the avalanche of good data that even a developing country can turn out. It was quite a contrast from the Saudis.

As I think back at what I have said so far, I realize that I left something out. I don't know if it is a subject that should not be discussed these days but let's find out. The relationship between the Department of State and the CIA was something that was never covered in any significant way in training. I don't know how I knew, probably in conversation with my more sophisticated classmates, that there would be CIA officers in the consulate general in Calcutta. They were truly spooky in the sense of being shadowy, of conveying the impression that they didn't really trust the State people. Not that the State people had any need or urge I think to know any details about sources or anything.

I can remember needing to talk to one of the CIA officers in Calcutta. They had their own separated off section of the building, and so I walked into that section as I would to any other section, causing tremendous consternation and a scramble to cover up documents. The leader came running out of his office and screamed "do you know where you are?" This was a mortifying experience and it really, I think, soured me on the whole arrangement for the rest of my career. Oddly enough, when I think about people that I was close to, not in Calcutta as it turned out but in other posts, they were often CIA officers at my grade. I never did get it right with the CIA leadership at a post after that, I don't think, including when I was DCM in Nigeria.

Q: I wasn't told this either. You sort of picked this up by people whispering. It was silly because obviously the enemy intelligence agents knew exactly who was who.

BLAKEMORE: As well as all of the Indian employees.

Q: There was a lot of posturing and duplication. I am dubious about an awful lot of what happened.

BLAKEMORE: There was not a whole lot of sharing of information either, which of course is a policy decision. I can imagine various reasons why it would be good not to share information widely. It was a terrible introduction, a terrible first experience that really colored my views. I don't know if something happened between State and CIA in the late '50s or the early '60s that this was an overreaction to, I have no idea. The same kind of unpleasantness characterizes my memory of the relationship with those folks in Jeddah. The same kind of super secretive, "you don't really need to know what's going on here" attitude. Very troublesome.

Q: It is, and often I've gotten from other conversations, that you find out that you are both milking the same cow essentially. It is not as though one is getting one source and one is getting the other. It often doesn't work that way.

BLAKEMORE: Sometimes it does. I have more favorable stories from other posts.

Q: Did you see any problem with the fact that you had Saudis not working too hard in the ministries and Palestinians, Pakistanis, Egyptians and all doing most of the work? We are not talking about common laborer, we are talking about commercial transactions, school teaching, the whole thing.

BLAKEMORE: There was certainly a problem in the minds of some of the Egyptians and Palestinians that I encountered but I think the Egyptians, at least, regarded it as part of the price of doing business. They made so much more money teaching school in Saudi than they could have at home. They just accepted it. The Palestinians were more likely to be D.P.s

Q: D.P.s being displaced persons?

BLAKEMORE: Yes. They couldn't go home. They didn't have a home to go to anymore. They were much more likely to be bitter but also to be really careful about what they said because they were there at the sufferance of the Saudi government. I think everybody kind of accepted that that was the way it worked.

Q: In '68 when you were leaving did you feel that you wanted to get yourself tagged as an economist?

BLAKEMORE: I thought you were going to say Arabist. As an economist, yes, but certainly not as an Arabist. I said, "Okay, that's enough of this experience" and of course it was a very unfair sample of what life in the Arab world in a personal sense can be like. My wife had left about eight months early and she said "I can't stand this any more." She came home to Washington.

Q: The double whammy of Calcutta and Jeddah is a little tough. What was the background of your wife?

BLAKEMORE: She is from Texas. I met her at Valparaiso University. She majored in English and eventually was able to work at the consulate in India and at the embassy in Saudi Arabia. Otherwise I think she would have gone nuts. She was at least as shocked by all of this experience as I was only as we used to say, I could at least go to the American embassy or the office every day and she couldn't until she got the job.

Q: In '68 where to?

BLAKEMORE: I expressed a strong interest in two directions. One to come home to Washington and secondly to have an economic assignment. The coming home to Washington part is a frequent pattern in my career. I think I have spent more time in Washington than anybody I know in the Foreign Service. I have never had back-to-back overseas assignments. The reasons for that are two fold. First, my wife always was eager to try to figure out what she wanted to do when she grew up so that she could pursue a career. Secondly, unlike many of my colleagues in the Foreign Service, I felt a real attachment to Washington. I mean to living in the United States and to living in Washington. We have belonged to a church here in Washington since 1962. I still belong to that church. The church helped define "home" as we wandered around the world.

My Washington assignment was in the trade agreements division of the economic bureau. This is the office that managed the American participation in the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, GATT as it was called, headquartered in Geneva. When I got there in '68 the organization, GATT, and all the people that worked on it were still exhausted from the five year marathon of the Kennedy round of tariff reductions which had been completed at the end of June in 1967.

Q: This was really the first major one wasn't it?

BLAKEMORE: The first one where the tariff reductions negotiated really would bite and really would make a difference in terms of forcing industries to be more competitive and also increasing the volume of world trade. It really did have that impact. I was really reeling in that assignment because I've already described the shallow kind of economic work I'd been exposed to in Jeddah which was my whole experience. I didn't bring much in the way of analytical capabilities to the job but on top of that the whole language of an office working on GATT was entirely new to me. I couldn't have told you what GATT was before I walked in the office that first day.

Q: You were there from '68 to?

BLAKEMORE: '70. Two years. It was tough. I started out handling most of the developing country accounts. What we were trying to do was kind of monitor the follow-through on what people had promised to do at the end of the Kennedy round. Were they doing it? When violations of the agreement were identified we would pursue those with the other country. I spent the first year doing developing countries which was a good way to ease into the work because they weren't the key focus obviously.

I had a wonderful mentor whose name was Helen Brewster. She was a long time civil servant employee of the State Department. She had come to Washington like so many women during World War II. She was a true expert on trade matters and spent a lot of time in Geneva during the five year negotiation. Her door was always open. She led me through all sorts of trouble that I would encounter and just come to a complete blank. Something would arrive in my in-box and my reaction would be: "What the hell is that?" "What am I suppose to do with that?" Helen never lost patience, never failed to help me do what I needed to do.

I must have done reasonably well because after one year I took over from the guy in the adjacent office who handled the US-Canada auto agreement. It was a brand new belabored agreement between the two countries that eliminated barriers to trade in automobiles and parts between Canada and the United States. From fiddling around with minor issues with Argentina or Brazil that had maybe 100,000 to 200,000 dollars worth of trade involved, I was plunged into the U.S. Canada auto agreement which covered billions of dollars of trade in each direction. It had great political sensitivity. It disrupted productions patterns and led to major shifts in the industry. The major automobile producers built many more plants in Canada in that first two or three year period than they ever had before.

Q: With this Canadian American auto agreement did you get involved with the Canadians at all?

BLAKEMORE: Yes, quite a bit. I was just thinking I don't know if it shows in my voice but this was the first work that I did in the Foreign Service that really turned me on. It had everything about it. It gave me lots of interaction with the Canadian Embassy and also with several ministries in Ottawa. It was important work. The volume of trade made it important work and the size of the adjustment that had to be made by the companies and the governments as well.

It gave me the chance to go to Canada several times and it also introduced me for the first time to the wonders of inter-agency coordination of policy which I think a lot of Foreign Service people find awful. It is one of the many reasons Foreign Service people hate to come to Washington. For some reason it has always been interesting and attractive to me, that is to take the process of deciding what the State Department would like to see happen in response to some kind of event, stimulus, whatever and then make the effort to try to sell that preferred response to the other interested agencies. In this case the Department of Commerce was the main player, Treasury was a major player. I like that. I had never been involved in that before and I found that exciting. I had a wonderful practitioner to watch do that in the person of Jules Katz.

Q: Yes, I have interviewed Jules.

BLAKEMORE: He is a real expert on the US-Canadian relationship. consummate bureaucratic player. A great guy to work for.

Q: What was your impression of the Canadians as far as how they approached this in dealing with them?

BLAKEMORE: The first thing that struck me was that there was a difference of opinion as to what the agreement meant. When the agreement was initially negotiated, the U.S. side had been forced to accept some concessions that made it less than equal in the beginning. They had been forced to let the Canadian government impose on the American manufacturers some minimum investment in Canada, minimum production in Canada restrictions that the U.S. side believed, we would call it a sunset provision now, would only last for five years and then it would be over with. The Canadians believed that the restrictions would last forever.

That was a surprise to me but also my impression was that they didn't feel able to compete on quite an even footing. They had to have these built in safeguards, or more to the point, they didn't trust that the Detroit investment decisions were truly independent. They felt that they were somehow intended to be in the best interests in the United States and not necessarily in the best interests of Ford or the North American market. I was fascinated by what I learned about the English-French split in Canada but also the Canadian sense of inferiority and belief that many things about Canada couldn't stand up to competition from the United States. I saw a lot more of that later when I spent two years as an economic officer on the Canada desk. I got the first hint of it I think in the auto agreement negotiation.

Q: Did you find that maybe this sense of inferiority that you are talking about was a negotiating ploy of saying "poor little us and great big you" or was this a deep seeded feeling?

BLAKEMORE: That's a good question. But I think the Canadian government would honestly say: "we don't trust the auto makers because they are your auto makers. There is no reason why they would ever make a decision in our favor if there is a question between Canadian interests and U.S. interests. There is never going to be any doubt in the makers' minds because they are American auto producers. And therefore Canada needs protection." I think the inferiority was an inference I drew, because Canada enjoyed such wonderful economic advantages, for example, and in wage rates. There was the greatest natural incentive for the firms to emphasize their investment in Canada. In fact some thoughtful people on the U.S. side were afraid that it would go way to far. That the firms would just go crazy and move most of their operations to Canada. I guess the answer to your question is that it was just a sense, an inference, about the way Canadians went about their business with us.

Q: As you were doing this, we're talking about this first period of '68 to '70, how did you find your counterparts? Were they young and inexperienced too?

BLAKEMORE: No, no. Very experienced. They had their best people on the problem. Their best trade people certainly worked on US-Canada trade and then the auto agreement was the main thing. I made a factual misstatement a while ago. I said the auto agreement was new. It wasn't. It was 1962 that it had been negotiated but what was hot at the time that I started working on this was the five year special provisions to protect Canada which we thought were going to expire and they didn't agree with that. That's what was hot.

Q: How did that work out during your time?

BLAKEMORE: I think, as I recall, in the end we agreed to de facto continuation of most of them simply because the Canadians weren't going to play on any other basis.

Q: What was your impression of the automobile manufacturers? Did you deal with them at all?

BLAKEMORE: Not very much. I wasn't at a level to deal with them. My impression of them was that they were very pragmatic and were so turned on by the potential of the combined market that they were willing to do what was necessary to keep the political wolves at bay. I think they were a lot less upset by some of these restrictions than we were. Not always, but usually.

Q: Did congress play much of a role as far as pressure on what you all were doing?

BLAKEMORE: I don't think it significantly affected it. It wasn't major role.

Q: How about labor?

BLAKEMORE: I don't remember.

Q: Here you are interested in economics and you are sort of learning, asking questions and all. It would seem that something of this nature wouldn't be something that would call for a high degree of economic knowledge, it was almost a political knowledge.

BLAKEMORE: Yes, and maybe that is the kind of economics that I like best. You had to at least speak the language of economics. You had to be able to understand something about trade flows and about sectoral development in one country versus another. But you are right, it is a very political kind of agreement.

Q: One of the concerns I have heard about the Foreign Service is that we bring people back for a two to four year period having served abroad where they know what they are doing. All of a sudden they are up against people at Treasury, or Congress or the Pentagon who have been dealing with an issue for 20 or 30 years. The Foreign Service officer is usually younger and comes in with almost zero experience in that particular issue and they are up against these hired killers practically. Can you talk about this at that time?

BLAKEMORE: I think it is of real concern particularly in the economic area. It was not a problem with regards to the U.S. Canada auto agreement because of Jules Katz. The State Department had the best player on the field and he was always here. He didn't go overseas because he was civil service.

But yes, I have found that to be a problem on a couple of levels. First of all people had been dealing with the problems longer. They had the background and they didn't always share it all with you. It depended on how well disposed they were. You being the Foreign Service officer trying to catch up with whatever the issue of the day was.

The other thing, maybe more importantly, was the interpersonal relationship between the long term players on an issue in Washington. People in Treasury and Commerce had long ago worn the rough edges off each other in most cases and that seemed like a real advantage. Their interaction, the way they were able to reach compromise positions, or exchange information informally or whatever, often was something I was envious of because I didn't know these people. And they didn't know whether they could trust me. So that is a real issue.

Of course the other side of that coin is that sometimes on a particular issue with Treasury and Commerce, it's a trench warfare arrangement reminiscent of World War I. They are so dug in against each other that they can't accomplish anything and that is always an opportunity for the new kid on the block at State to move things along. I think there is some arrogance in the Foreign Service position about that sort of thing which is akin to the way, in the Navy's view, the Naval officer as a generalist can do anything as well as anybody else. As the world gets more and more specialized and technical that's not really true of either naval officers or Foreign Service officers. I agree with the general point. The U.S.-Canada auto agreement is not a good example because Katz and some other civil service people had been at it for a long time in State.

Q: What was the general attitude in the economic bureau about thi agreement? Was this a good thing?

BLAKEMORE: Yes, I think the Department was very pro-agreement, very much. I think, as I recall, the caution was exercised by the Treasury Department which was very much concerned about the balance of payments implications of the agreement and not necessarily the industrial implications.

Q: Did you get any of the feeling with this auto agreement that the people in the economic bureau were looking around and saying "gee this is a great agreement, it is a great thing, let's find some other openings"?

BLAKEMORE: I never heard any discussion of anything beyond that. I think the general consensus at the time was this is a unique industry, and they didn't want to scare anybody. The conditions in this industry are special and we responded to that specialness. On the other hand, even though we didn't talk about it or I didn't know it at the time, it was obviously the precursor of the North American Free Trade Agreement.

Q: Which now it is known as NAFTA.

BLAKEMORE: If the auto agreement had not worked NAFTA would, I don't think, ever have gotten off the ground. I don't know the figures but I would guess that automotive trade is still a huge share of the total NAFTA trade.

Q: Were you aware of any, within Treasury, Commerce or State, guerrilla warriors who were against this and really didn't like this?

BLAKEMORE: As you ask that question I have a sense of seeing some of that from the Treasury Department but I don't recall any details that would be useful.

Q: From a career point of view, did you fall under thadministrations of Frances Wilson at all?

BLAKEMORE: Not up to the point that we are talking about. She was the executive director of the economic bureau. She had to approve all assignments in the bureau.

Q: Over my interviews I had heard this even when I was in the Foreign Service, she was a very powerful and aggressive developer of the economic function.

BLAKEMORE: She was, and very autocratic I think, but up to this point I did not encounter her. I needed her to take the next step which was the six month intensive economics training. I didn't have a chance of getting into that without her blessing.

Q: Is that what came next?

BLAKEMORE: That's what came next and I can recall having to go up to the sixth floor for an interview with her. I had never met her. I never had any reason to encounter her but she had to see me before she would approve me for that training which took place in Rosslyn.

Q: It was not only a converted garage but it was also an undergroundgarage, some of it.

BLAKEMORE: Economic training was in a new building in Rosslyn which is no longer in State Department hands. The economic training was nicely done. Six months of training that gave me the equivalent of a bachelors in economics. It was a great experience. I loved it. That was the second half of 1970.

Q: Who was the major trainer? Was it Jacques Reinstein at thapoint?

BLAKEMORE: No. The person that stood out was the mathematics instructor. I can't remember his name but I think he was the best teacher I ever had. His enthusiasm for mathematics was so great, his love of mathematics was so great, that he just sort of forced other people to join his love. He would fill the board with figures and then turn around and grin and say "Isn't that gorgeous? Isn't that beautiful?" He wasn't being sarcastic. You could tell by the look on his face that he was enthralled by it. He was good.

We did calculus for at least two weeks before he used the "c" word because he knew that if he told people that they were doing calculus that half of them would turn off. When the teacher admitted we had been doing Calculus for a couple of weeks, one officer just put his pencil down and said "I can't do this stuff." He absolutely refused to try to do the mathematics side of that course.

I think it was ill advised but the intensive course had very much a mathematics oriented approach to economics. Ill advised I think because Foreign Service officers are almost never called upon to do the kind of sophisticated analysis that they were preparing us for. But it was a good course, a very good course. Good instructors from George Washington on micro and macro. A wonderful strange old Austrian guy who did the international side: international payments, international finance. A great course.

Q: It is now after six months, when was the course?

BLAKEMORE: The second half of 1970 and we got out in the middle of January 1971.

Q: Whither?

BLAKEMORE: Seoul. I keep depicting myself as a person who didn't know much about foreign affairs, and it's not really false modesty. I was certainly ignorant of Northeast Asia when I first went to Korea, and it was the best thing that happened to me in my career.

Q: You were in Seoul from '71 to?

BLAKEMORE: '74. It was probably the best thing that happened to my career. I wound up spending ten or eleven years working on Korea. After my two initial assignments in Calcutta and Jeddah it was a wonderful thing to go to a country that despite its Asianness and the terrible difficulty of the language, was accessible in a cultural, personal, professional, every sense. It was much more accessible than either India or Saudi Arabia.

Q: Can you tell me about your impression of the situation in Korea when you arrived in '71?

BLAKEMORE: Park Chung Hee had been in power for ten years by then and he was getting a little more heavy handed. He had always been heavy handed but it was getting to be a little unpleasant, a little nasty. It was harder and more awkward for us to maintain a close relationship and be quiet about the repression that was going on. There wasn't much dissent tolerated. The climax while we were there in 1972 was when Park declared martial law and threw out the constitution and wrote a new one that made it much more legitimate for him to be so repressive. That made me uncomfortable and it made most of the people in the embassy uncomfortable to have such an intimate and close relationship with that kind of a government.

There were 50,000 U.S. troops still there and there is a very strongly worded mutual security treaty. We really have no moral option if South Korea is attacked; we are going to go in and up to our necks immediately. There was a lot of discomfort about that.

The ambassador was Phil Habib. William Porter at first but then he left and Habib came. A wonderful dynamic guy. He would have Saturday morning bull sessions with the junior officers. No one above the grade of five under the old system was literally not allowed in the room. It was a great opportunity to air our concerns: what are we doing allying with this government, particularly after the 1972 changeover to a more restrictive system? The ambassador was wonderful. He was willing to share some of his own doubts and his sense of a lack of alternatives. We would go on for a couple of hours and invariably, (I don't know if you ever encountered Habib but he was a real dynamo, badgering, foul mouthed but a very warm person with a great sense of humor) we would have a loud shouting match. Here was an FSO-6 having a shouting match with the ambassador and the ambassador was obviously loving it.

The other major professional impression coming to Korea in 1971 was being present at the birth of a miracle. I was doing economic work, and 1971 was the first year that Korean exports hit a billion dollars. The excitement in the press and in the community was akin to the fulfillment of the Kennedy goal to put a man on the moon. They were determined to export a billion dollars worth of stuff that year and they did. That was the good side of Park Chung Hee. He was personally involved. He recognized good economic advice when he heard it and left the economic advisors alone after he had approved the general approach. He supported them. His picture was in the paper every day putting a medal around the neck of some other industrialist who had met his piece of the billion dollars. November and December were just full of that kind of stuff. It was very exciting.

My responsibility in the embassy was trade and balance of payments which was, I thought, the very heart of the economy. I really liked it a lot. Again it seems to me that everywhere I've been I'm talking about mentors. USAID still had a big operation in Korea at that time and they should not have because it was not needed any more in my opinion. AID had a big economic analysis section, and Habib put it and the embassy economic section together. And so there were three Ph.D.s right down the hall from me. I again mercilessly tapped their help as to whether what I wanted to say about the balance of payments situation made sense.. I have been a cheering spectator of the Korean economy ever since. I have great admiration for what they have achieved.

Q: Talking about AID, what was your impression because this is really the first time you were up against this AID apparatus? They were in a separate building, weren't they, for a while? Weren't there twin buildings?

BLAKEMORE: Yes, twin buildings, but the integrated economic section was in the embassy building. They sit right next to each other, the two buildings. Right after I left that first time in Korea, we gave the USAID building to the economic planning board of the Korean government. Under Habib, there wasn't any way that USAID could go down some kind of a separate road. His personality was just too big and the head of the AID mission also served as the embassy economic counselor.

Q: Who was that?

BLAKEMORE: Mike Adler, an AID officer, who worked both jobs. He really played along nicely in terms of taking both jobs seriously and integrating the economic function.

Q: What was your impression of Korean industry at that time and sort of what we were thinking about it because in the 1960s Korea was considered a basket case? We're there for political reasons, we've got to keep the North Koreans out, but Korea was considered hopeless for a while.

BLAKEMORE: Once Park provided political stability, he came to power in '61, and listened to and put in place some good advice (and USAID had a lot to do with the process of helping him identify good people to do various pieces of the job) the Korean private sector response to the capitalist opportunities presented was just breathtaking. It was a terrific response.

I ran into my first real moral dilemma in the Foreign Service at this time because the energy, the engine behind this growth initially was textiles. I was the interface with the Korean government on behalf of US negotiators David Kennedy and Anthony Jurich who in 1971 insisted that the Koreans agree to so-called voluntary limits on their textile exports to the United States. This was an amazingly unpleasant experience in many ways to be the point person for a policy which was forcing Korea to cut back exports from the sector that had pulled the country up out of poverty.

Q: This was inspired by Nixon's southern strategy, wasn't it?

BLAKEMORE: Yes I think so.

Q: Could you explain that.

BLAKEMORE: I think that is where that came from. The U.S. textile industry centered in the south was under a lot of pressure from foreign competition. Cotton textiles had been under controls for a long time, which is why the Korean surge was concentrated on synthetics.

Q: How did you go about this? You are going in saying now you've done so well that you've got to stop it?

BLAKEMORE: That is essentially what happened. We pointed out to them the path that they eventually took that made it much less painful than it looked. The restrictions agreed on limited the number of square yards equivalent they could ship us a year in dozens and dozens of different categories. There was a formula for deciding how many square yards equivalent were in a shirt, a t-shirt, or sweater. The fact that the restrictions were expressed in square yards gave Koreans the opportunity to upgrade its product over the next ten years to increase the value of each square yard shipped.. I'm not sure that it really hurt them in the end at all but presentationally, and before they could see that they were going to be able to adjust, they were devastated. Their feelings were hurt. They couldn't believe that we would do this to them.

Q: The Koreans are not what I would call a sensitive race. They are very hard charging and very straight forward. How did you find dealing with them on this?

BLAKEMORE: All the stereo-types about East Asians fall away in one sense when you are dealing with Korea. A "you make me do this and I'll lose my job" kind of response was not unusual and was not play acting. There was no effort to hide their dismay and disappointment which really made it easier to do business. They weren't pretending. They were giving you what their reaction was.

David Kennedy, a Mormon, was a charmer and to see him at a Kisaeng party, the sort of down and dirty Korean equivalent of a geisha party, was quite an experience. I attended many of these parties with Kennedy over the course of these negotiations. Of course he didn't drink alcohol at all, but I probably drank enough for both of us. It was really kind of a bizarre footnote on this whole process because they try to be their gracious selves with him and he seemed to have a wonderful time at these parties stone sober while everybody else was drunk. Of course it didn't make any difference. The next morning his position was, "Have you made up your mind yet to do what you have to do?"

Q: Was it sort of the bottom line that the United States could still force the Koreans to do this?

BLAKEMORE: That's how it came out although the Koreans are very effective at negotiating with us. They played the special relationship and I am confident that they managed to skew in their favor the way the shares of various exporting countries were calculated. They earned some major concessions by hard bargaining within the context of a US ultimatum. They had practice at that. For example, the payoff they extracted for sending a division to Vietnam went on and on and on and was worth big bucks. It's also how they got the F-4 fighters which initially we didn't want them to have. We gave them a significant amount of incremental aid as a result of signing the textile agreement, much of it in the form of PL480.

Q: We will probably pick this up another time, but at this time, was there a Korean form of negotiating that you can think of, a stereotype of how they negotiated?

BLAKEMORE: I don't know if I could say that or not. Certainly in negotiating with us, the atmosphere never deteriorated. It never got personal. I guess the pattern was to say today that they couldn't do it, whatever it was, and then sneak around the back way tomorrow and agree to most of it. I don't know if that constitutes a negotiating style.

How about it if I talk just a little bit about what it was like to be in Korea. It seemed to me that everything was right about it. It is a beautiful country. It is hard to be out of sight of the mountains in Korea. In fact, I'm not sure it is literally possible if the weather is clear. The roads were good even then so my wife and I were able to travel all over the country on our own. People were friendly. I liked Korean food a lot, from the beginning. They have a very interesting cultural background although they don't have some of the other stereotypes of East Asia, they certainly are culturally mysterious to Americans. There is a lot that goes on that takes a while to understand why it happens and how it happens. I really felt very attached to Korea and still do as a result of that experience.

Q: Did you run across in any of your economic work the Korean antipathy towards the Japanese and looking over their shoulder at the Japanese?

BLAKEMORE: Absolutely and their ambivalence about it was very obvious. The Koreans, like other East Asians, took pride in Japanese accomplishments: "Our part of the world can stand up to the West economically." The history between the two countries is so bitter and has been for so long that the distaste for Japanese people and the Japanese way of doing things was always near the surface but it did not keep Koreans from making money by dealing with Japan. I don't know what the situation is now. I have been away from it for a while, but the Japanese were by far the largest foreign investor in Korea when I was there. A lot of it was small investment. Not Mitsubishi so much as the equivalent of Tanaka's little textile mill with a branch in Korea. The Koreans benefitted greatly from that. It was my first glimpse of what I noticed about them over and over again over the years: Koreans are extremely pragmatic. It is unusual for Koreans to let their feelings get in the way of their best interests economically or in terms of security or whatever. Maybe that's the answer to your question about negotiating style.

Q: I have an interview with Mike Smith that I was just looking at which said that the Koreans didn't stop negotiating until he was climbing up the steps of the ladder to the plane. That's still textiles right?

BLAKEMORE: Yes. Habib used to tell stories about negotiating on thtarmac with them.

Q: In dealing with this what was your impression about how Park Chung Hee was managing the economy? I've heard stories about how he used to go to the Ministry of Economics once a week or something and say "How are you doing?" and with the BDI and have reports. In other words he would keep the feet to the fire.

BLAKEMORE: Absolutely. There were weekly briefings and he wanted detail. I admired him for not acting as if he knew economics better than the guys with him. I think he was, as you say, keeping their feet to the fire, making sure that they knew they would be accountable to him for progress or for failure. They had to have good reasons why things that they had planned to do and hoped to do didn't work out. To me it was a great model for developing country political leadership because the country was stable, the interest of the president was obvious to anybody who could read and that's everybody in Korea, but he did not act like Baltimore Orioles owner Peter Angelos here and assume that he knew more about baseball than the manager.

Q: This is Peter Angelos who has just fired the winning manager of the Orioles. Had influence come from Korean economists and others who are trained in the United States sort of penetrating the Korean economy in the way that later in Chile they had what they called the Chicago boys? Was there anything of this nature there?

BLAKEMORE: Oh, yes, and in Korea's case I guess they would be more Harvard boys than Chicago. U.S. trained economists were prominent in every economic ministry. I left Korea in '74 and came back in '80. In that six year period there was a flood of Ph.D.s of all kinds returning from the United States to Korea because they could see the economic progress. Yes it was there in '74. By 1980 it was much more dramatic and not just in economics, but in everything.

Q: I ran the consular section from '76 to '79 and one of my joys was to look at where the students were going. I had been at places where they were going to East Texas Pilot School and things of this nature. The Koreans were going to top notch places. This was a serious generation that was going.

BLAKEMORE: They were a major element to the success of the whole program.

Q: Did you run across any of these yourself as far as in your discussions on various matters?

BLAKEMORE: Oh, yes. The transition I think was obvious in my experience in the textile negotiations. One of the higher up guys in the Ministry of Commerce was a former KATUSA, Korean Auxiliary to the U.S. Army. He had worked for the Army. If not during the war, shortly thereafter. He spoke beautiful idiomatic English but it wasn't quite right and I don't think he had more than a high school education. His deputy was a Ph.D. in economics from Tufts. You could see the changeover coming. Towards the end of my first tour in Korea, the top guy was kicked upstairs to do something else and the change took place.

Q: Were there any concerns on our part that maybe some day we might have a balance of payments problem with Korea? I think we were beginning to look at that in Japan weren't we?

BLAKEMORE: We certainly were looking at that in Japan and it was on the horizon in Korea. I think it became more of a concern in the early '80s when their shift into heavier industry began to bear fruit in terms of exports. We did worry, but not really in the '70s.

Q: Just on the general atmosphere, how during this '71 to '74 period did you, and maybe your compatriots, look at the "threat from the North?" I'm talking about the North Koreans.

BLAKEMORE: It was very serious. I think I may have gone there with some skepticism about hype and so on but it became clear to me that the threat was very real. The North Koreans were not operating on the same logical basis that we were anyway, except that deterrence worked so I guess that is logical in that sense. I never felt unsafe in Seoul. I never wondered about having my family there, I had two children by this time. If that was the point of your question that was not a problem.

Q: I was just thinking about how seriously it was taken.

BLAKEMORE: The Park government particularly, and the Chun Do Won government after him, could never resist the temptation to cite the threat from the north as a reason for the repression of the day against dissidents. The awkward position that put us in was that we never really disagreed. It was not necessarily true that there had been an increase in the threats this week and therefore that is why you had to shut down this newspaper, but the threat was there.

I wanted to say one general thing about my experience in Korea. I had always regretted the fact that as an economic officer going out in 1971, I was given zero training in Korean language. That wasn't so bad doing economic work. I don't think it really hurt me professionally. But I think it was insulting to the Koreans that no one in the economic section spoke Korean. By the end of the tour I got around reasonably well in the social sense. But it takes two years full time to learn Korean at a professional level. One three year tour was bad enough but I ended up working ten or eleven years on Korea all together and never did stop to do that two years of language. This was increasingly embarrassing when I came back as political counselor the second time. It was really too bad.

Q: I don't want to put words in your mouth, but when I was out there and I was not dealing with the political issues, but there was sort of an underlying feeling I felt that the Koreans were known as the Irish of Asia. If you gave them too much political freedom god only knows what they will do. They would be all over the place and splitting and again you would have a weak government. This is part of our built-in toleration of the Park Chung Hee thing. Was that prevalent when you were there?

BLAKEMORE: I guess so. I guess the memory of what it was like between Syngman Rhee and Park in the '60-'61 period was very fresh in peoples' minds. That is a little scary when you've got an enemy with a couple of thousand tanks poised to come across the border.

Q: Thirty miles away or something like that.

BLAKEMORE: In the event the Koreans have done extremely well in their experiment with a more democratic government.

Q: Either over time things have developed more or else we were dead wrong at not giving credit to the Koreans for putting it together, probably a little of both.

BLAKEMORE: I was going to say probably both. We are getting ahead of the story here but I was very surprised when the great changeover came in Korea and how smoothly and easily it happened. We certainly hadn't anticipated it.

Q: Is there anything else we should talk about in this particular period.

BLAKEMORE: I don't think so.

Q: Why don't we stop here and we'll pick it up the next time. You left Seoul in 1974 and we'll pick it up where you go then.

Today is the 5th of December, 1997. Where did you go after you left Seoul?

BLAKEMORE: I came back to Washington on rather short notice. I had some health problems that had to be dealt with here in Washington rather than overseas. On short notice I was assigned to the Bangladesh desk or as we called it, "the Bangladesk." I was the second of two officers. Bangladesh was a brand new country in 1975. I think the split with Pakistan was less than a year old when I arrived. The new country was faced immediately with a severe, widespread famine to which the world responded heroically and the United States very much in the lead. My year on that desk was largely devoted to the politics and logistics of food assistance.

Q: Before we get into this, could you describe what the situation was as you saw it? It was a new country. You had been in Korea before. When did Bangladesh form? Just a very brief history and our attitudes towards the area and the type of government it had.

BLAKEMORE: The war of independence, I think the Bengalis would call it independence from Pakistan, my memory is not very helpful but I think it probably ended early in 1975. I want to say perhaps February 1975. By the time I got there in the summer, the country was really just getting on its feet. Sheik Musib was the prime minister. He had been elected and was an extremely popular man in Bangladesh as independence leaders often are. I think the United States had accepted the inevitability of the division of Pakistan and had quite quickly recognized and established a formal presence in Dacca. All that felt like ancient history by the time that I got there in July 1975 because the famine loomed so large it pushed all those political considerations aside. As I recall, my entire year there was devoted to the famine issue.

Q: What caused the famine?

BLAKEMORE: I think that part of the world, and I had seen it in my own experience in Calcutta, is very much good news and bad news agriculturally. In good years that delta is capable of producing three crops of rice in a single year which probably explains the heavy population density. On the other hand, flooding and drought are major problems. More frequently flooding and as I recall the whole Chittagong area, the whole Bangladeshi shore of the Ganges delta had been flooded and crops destroyed. That was at least a big part of the problem although the shortage of food was all over the country, upcountry as well as those areas near the sea. I guess I can't give you the full explanation but I do recall major flooding before I got there.

Q: So it was basically acts of nature and not fouled up (inaudible).

BLAKEMORE: Very much so but the limits on human response to hunger of that magnitude became clear very quickly. The number that I can remember is that the United States provided 18 million tons of grain to Bangladesh in the single year that I was there. It is really a staggering figure. Virtually all of it either AID or PL480 that is free in the short term. And PL480 has a 40 year pay-back which is virtually free in the long term as well. The world's ability and particularly the ability of the United States to deposit huge amount of grain in Chittagong in a short period of time was demonstrated. The Bengali government was not able, did not have the infrastructure or the organization, to move that grain from the docks to all the places that it was needed. You had the contradiction of continuing starvation upcountry while grain rotted on the docks in Chittagong.

Q: You said you had to deal with the various aspects including the politics of the food aid. What were the politics of the food aid from your perspective?

BLAKEMORE: I'm trying to remember. It seems like a long time ago. Maybe that was an ill-considered phrase. Because the need was so obvious, I don't think there was much resistance to the idea of moving as much PL480 grain to Bangladesh as possible so I probably shouldn't have said that. In fact, because the Bengalis like the kind of rice that we grow in Louisiana, we're talking about the days when Otto Passman from Louisiana dominated the foreign aid sub-committee in the House, even that problem did not arise. They were happy to have Mr. Passman's rice.

Q: We've had problems with that particularly when you move fartheeast to Thailand, Korea and all that. They don't like Louisiana rice.

BLAKEMORE: That's right they don't like Louisiana rice. During my first tour in Korea we sometimes insisted that if the Koreans wanted PL480 assistance from us it would have to include a significant amount of Louisiana rice which they did not want. But that did not apply in Bangladesh.

Q: When you say you were involved, what were you doing on the desk?

BLAKEMORE: It was a matter of working closely with the AID people responsible for South Asia to move along all the steps that are required to get PL480 shipped. Agreement that the Bengalis would get a certain share and then being certain that the formal country to country agreements associated with that were signed. Paying attention to shipping schedules, that kind of thing. The logistics of moving that much grain are staggering.

Q: Was the internal distribution problem our concern too? Where wready to go in or anybody ready to go in and help the Bangladeshis?

BLAKEMORE: As I recall we did not in any significant way. It seems to me that we regarded that as their problem. It wasn't only a shortage of transport, it was a shortage of roads. The roads were inadequate so even if somebody had moved in trucks from the outside they couldn't really have solved the problems very well.

Talking about this I just recall that I have lost a year. I've been talking about 1975. That is wrong. We are talking about the summer of '74 that I arrived on the desk.

Q: You were there a year. Did India get involved at all from youerspective?

BLAKEMORE: No. One of the interesting things about being on the Bangladesh desk was that it was part of a larger country directorate that included Pakistan and Afghanistan. It was interesting to me and educational to eavesdrop on what other officers in the suite were doing on a couple of countries that I had known absolutely nothing about. My experience had been India and that was in the adjoining suite. We didn't talk to them. India, Nepal and Sri Lanka were in the adjoining suite.

Q: What was the impression at that time of the prime minister Sheikh Mujibur.

BLAKEMORE: I think we were very much impressed with him. We thought he exercised some excellent leadership in terms of rallying the country to deal with a very difficult crisis. I think he was a little short on administrative skill which is not a surprising development since he came to power as a revolutionary leader.

Q: Was there any repercussions from the so called tilt being made towards Pakistan?

BLAKEMORE: I don't recall that being a significant concern that the Bengalis were voicing to us anyway. They were very much in a dependent position toward us at the time that I was there.

Q: During the time that you were there, how did the relief effort work out?

BLAKEMORE: As I was saying, I think it was a mixed success because of the difficulty in getting the grain to the more remote areas. I think the northern part of Bangladesh suffered and the response that we made simply wasn't able to be effective for them. In the more populated parts of the country, I would say it was a great success.

Q: How did you find working with AID?

BLAKEMORE: I guess I was pleasantly surprised. I had not really had much contact with AID in my previous assignments, certainly no Washington contact. I found the AID office that I worked with, two of them a man and a woman on the desk on the AID side of the building, both very effective and easy people to deal with. They were looking to do the same things that we were doing. Because it was a crisis perhaps, there wasn't really any divergence of objectives.

Q: You were on that desk for a year from '74 to '75. In '75 whither?

BLAKEMORE: I had a very interesting two month stint on the Jordadesk filling in before my new assignment started.

Q: That was when everybody was in NEA wasn't it?

BLAKEMORE: That's right so it was the other half of the same bureau. King Hussein was making one of his official visits to the United States during that period. He came often but not always as an official visitor. That was my major focus in the two months that I was there. It was all the paper work and all the scurrying and preparation for a state visit. Interesting to get a little glimpse of Arab-Israel politics from the Washington perspective in the State Department. I don't have much recollection of the two months beyond that.

Q: Where would it be, '75 that you went?

BLAKEMORE: It was in the spring of '75.

Q: Where to?

BLAKEMORE: I moved downstairs one floor to the Canada desk. I was full time economic officer on the Canada desk.

Q: You were there from '75 to?

BLAKEMORE: To '77. I thoroughly enjoyed it. As we've talked, I got a taste of bilateral U.S.-Canada economic relations working on the auto agreement in the trade agreement division of the economic bureau. I got a lot more of the same. I worked on some very interesting issues and became aware, if I had not been before, of the tremendous importance of Canada to the United States, economically as well as militarily and politically. Obvious I suppose when you think about it, but by far our largest trading partner dwarfing all of the others with the auto trade being the biggest component of that. Often the longest undefended land border in the world has got some really interesting and contentious problems that flip back and forth across it. Trucking problems is one that I never got involved in but a very interesting one. Cross-border television probably took up more of my time than any other issue during my two years on the desk. It had to do with politics as well as economics. The issue is this, 90% of the Canadian population lives within 100 miles of the U.S. border and so virtually all of those people, and this is before cable television, were potential targets for U.S. television stations in Buffalo, Detroit, Bellingham, Washington, etc. That presents two problems from the point of view of the Canadian government and Canadian nationalists. One is the cultural domination of the United States in the form of what we think is good television. They found it threatening, disturbing. Secondly, Canadian firms recognizing the large Canadian audience that the U.S. border television stations have, advertised heavily on the U.S. stations in order to reach Canadian customers. This hurt right in the pocket book the competing Canadian stations who would have gotten the advertising if they had the market. That would be the American response, that it is all a matter of supply and demand. But at any rate, advertising dollars were being diverted, Canadian border stations were being hurt and U.S. cultural values were being encouraged in Canada. The Canadians began to manipulate their tax laws to penalize Canadian firms that advertised on U.S. stations. This seems like a fairly complicated situation as I described it and you might think it was a fairly minor issue but it certainly was not. It attracted some heavy hitters on both sides of the border. The U.S. border television people, the Buffalo stations and others, were willing to hire some influential lobbyists in Washington who argued that this would have amounted to an unacceptable interference with the free flow of ideas and so on, to stir up certain elements in the Congress on the subject. In the two years that I was there the issue was never really resolved except that the Canadian government as I recall delayed full implementation of the tax changes. The changes would have had a tremendous adverse effect on the U.S. border stations. This issue gave me a new insight into U.S.-Canadian nationalistic feeling that I had not fully appreciated before. It also gave me a look at the very arcane business of television and who pays whom for what. Which way does the money flow for advertising and programming and so on. And I met some interesting people. Former Senator Charles Goodell of New York was the leading lobbyist for the U.S. television people and he had some very interesting high-priced lawyers that he worked with and that I worked with. A fascinating subject.

Q: When you talk about the Canadians, you know if you are dealing with the French you are dealing with the so-called cultural things obviously there is a huge business component. On sort of the cultural side, did the Canadians have the equivalent to the intellectual class that sort of dominated that sort of thing. I would assume that most Canadians sat back and happily watched American programs but there would be people coming from the professorial ranks and artistic ranks who would be seething at this type of thing.

BLAKEMORE: That's right. That's what you saw. It was a relatively small but vocal minority centered in Ontario which is the center of English speaking Canadian nationalist sentiment anyway, it always has been. It wasn't only television. The same issue arose over American magazines, Time in particular, who had differential tax treatment or were faced with the possibility of differential tax treatment on advertising revenue. Yes a very small group but not easily ignored. You could almost say that there was some obvious insecurity evident here on the Canadian side because they feared and exaggerated the impact of the United States on Canada. On the other hand, I don't think we fully appreciate our impact on Canada as a large country so close to a small one in terms of population. We tend to think that because our attitudes towards Canada are benign, never trying to hurt Canada with our various economic and political activities, they should just excuse it if it happens to hurt them rather badly accidentally. The Koreans like the analogy of a mouse that is in bed with an elephant. When the elephant rolls over.

Q: I think it was Trudeau who said that.

BLAKEMORE: That problem is there. Canadians know a great deal about the United States and Americans know nothing about Canada generally speaking and that is too bad. It is kind of an undercurrent in the relationship that as you say, I think to the vast majority of Canadians it is not really an important thing. They are still happy because they live so close to the border, driving across the border to buy groceries in Minnesota because it is significantly cheaper because of the tax or whatever. They want to be able to keep doing that. They want to keep watching American television. They probably don't give a damn whether the Windsor, Ontario Chrysler dealer is advertising on a Detroit station or not. If it is not him it is somebody else. What do they care? There is still too darn much advertising on television. That would be the issue.

It makes a difference though what part of Canada you are talking about. The prairie provinces are also susceptible to nationalistic or provincial feelings. Another big issue that I dealt with in my time on the desk was the nationalization, or I should say provincialization of some American owned potash mines in Saskatchewan. Something that Americans found very offensive even though the Saskatchewan government when it claimed the mines gave a fair price to the owners. That didn't matter. It was a very nasty dispute over a component of fertilizer that I had known nothing about before I got the desk job. I learned that it is a very important component that does not occur in easily accessible commercial quantities in many places in the world. Saskatchewan has got a strong economic position with regards to potash. Again a lot of nationalist feelings on both sides and this time coming from the prairie provinces rather than from Ontario. As I recall we had a scheduled review of the workings of the auto agreement that went on in 1975-76, ten years after it was inaugurated. It was clear by that point that there was always going to be an automotive agreement. Nobody was going to back out of it so the review consisted of proposals from both sides for tinkering with the arrangements and a lot of rivalry from different sets of statistics to prove various points about how it was working. The bottom line was that everybody was benefitting: the unions, the companies, both countries. It was essentially left alone.

Q: Did you get involved in negotiations or was that sort of passeon to somebody else?

BLAKEMORE: I don't recall doing any negotiating with Canada. I think, if I can recall, I chaired one or two review sessions with regards to the auto agreement subcommittees but no, no negotiating. I had a chance to witness negotiations.

Q: In the witnessing of negotiations, I have picked up from other people who have dealt with this and they say that the Canadians are really quite good negotiators. They play "poor little Canada and you big America, you be nice to little Canada". If you don't watch out you'll be left with no pants on. Did you see that?

BLAKEMORE: I thought that the Canadians fielded some extremely competent diplomats across the board during that period. In terms of negotiations my feeling always was yes, there was a significant amount of posturing along those lines. The trouble was that both sides knew there was nowhere to go. No one was prepared to throw the baby out with the bath water. The relationship was fine and so I guess that probably made it a little galling to the Canadian negotiators because they knew that they didn't have any ace in the hole. No one was willing to pull the ace out of the hole if they had one.

Q: During this time did Quebec nationalism intrude itself at all?

BLAKEMORE: Yes, very much so and there was tremendous sensitivity in Ottawa about that. The U.S. government across the board, not just the State Department, had to be very much aware of any kind of statement that could inadvertently be interpreted in Ottawa as encouraging French separatism. It is odd because in many ways I think the province in Canada that is most integrated with the United States is Quebec. The whole northeast is a major, major customer of Quebec Hydro. Raw materials of all kinds come out of Quebec and wind up in the United States. I think the Québecois are making an assumption that if they manage to secede, to separate themselves from Canada, that we would immediately negotiate a special economic relationship with them which would cushion them from the dramatic drop in their standard of living which they would otherwise have to expect if they were separated from English Canada. I think this erroneous assumption on the part of the Québecois made U.S. policy makers very eager to support a unified Canada because we did not want to get stuck with the reality or expectation of having to somehow support Quebec after it had separated.

Q: Were we able, from your knowledge, able to convey this to them? Was our consul general able to convey this and say that this isn't in our interests?

BLAKEMORE: No and it was regarded as too delicate for that kind of direct conversation as far as I was aware. I think the Québecois would have had to have read between the lines of public statements of U.S. officials to conclude that. After all who could say with assurance what the United States would do if Quebec were to successfully separate? We might say we are not going to help you out but when New York State begins to die on the vine because it doesn't have the same access to Quebec Hydro, economic forces are going to force people's hands. It is very hard for me to imagine how that would play out.

Q: Was there planning at all, particularly on the economic side, about United States relations if Quebec opts out of Canada?

BLAKEMORE: No. It may have been going on elsewhere in the government but not where I could see it.

Q: Were there any other types of issues that you were dealing with?

BLAKEMORE: During my time on the desk it was decided to add a full time environmental officer. That portfolio had been covered on a catch-as-catch-can basis by a previous economic officer so that was a major step forward. I had an interesting look at the environmental issues but somebody else was handling them. No, I was busy full time just on economics.

Q: Was acid rain at all a cloud on the horizon?

BLAKEMORE: Yes it was. Not a major concern. I think cross border water pollution was a bigger issue at the time. As I think I said earlier in these tapes when we were talking about the auto agreement the first time, it is a little humbling for a State Department economic officer to work on Canada rather than Bangladesh or Korea because so much of the U.S. Canada economic relationship goes on outside the purview of government, either government. The part that you are able to be involved in and affect is relatively small. It is a huge relationship and an awful lot of it goes on quietly almost at local levels. Cross border market town kind of arrangements. Things move back and forth across the border all the time and no one in either Washington or Ottawa knows or cares about it.

Q: Did you ever find during the time that you were there that the state government or provincial government found that you government people from Washington were getting in their way? Bug off fellows.

BLAKEMORE: Yes, I can remember incidents where state and provincial governments got together and decided they could solve the problem without the involvement of the national governments. That was a little strange but needed to be dealt with in delicate ways. I don't think of examples at the moment but it does crop up on the basis of "We are here on the ground, lets just solve this problem. We don't need this other guy."

Q: Did you have much contact with counterparts at the Canada Embassy?

BLAKEMORE: Yes I did. The economic minister and commercial counselor were both people that I had a lot to do with and enjoyed getting acquainted with. They were both charming men.

Q: At that time did Quebec have the equivalent of its own foreign service or not?

BLAKEMORE: Within the Canadian foreign service? No. Do they now?

Q: They do almost yes. You have a Quebec representative or something. It is a peculiar thing. Was there a problem on the desk of getting the attention of the principals of the State Department on Canadian affairs?

BLAKEMORE: No, I don't recall that as a significant problem. There was a Deputy Assistant Secretary in the bureau, whose name was Richard Vine. A very effective man who was responsible for Canadian affairs as well as some other things and I don't remember what the others were. He was an effective spokesman on the seventh floor. No, I don't recall that as an issue because the magnitude of the economic numbers is so great you can usually get people's attention.

Q: I assume that you can get the border state governors and senators to call up any delinquency on the part of the State Department?

BLAKEMORE: Yes. Senator Ted Stevens of Alaska was fond of doing that on a variety of issues. That reminds me that a proposal to build a pipeline to get Alaskan oil down to where it can do some good was a major issue that we dealt with. It was, of course, also an environmental issue. There was a lot of Canadian concern about the proposals. I think there were three different proposals to build the line across Canada which would deposit the oil closer to eastern U.S. markets. The companies finally despaired of being able to do that and that led to the cross-Alaska pipeline down to Valdez and movement of the oil by ship from there, much of it exported actually. It really changed the impact of Alaskan oil, the fact that we could not move it across Canada.

Q: You did this until what, '77?

BLAKEMORE: Yes. I wanted to make one other general comment about Canada, my personal response. I can recall being very admiring of Pierre Trudeau and envious really that Canada had a leader of such style and intellectual caliber compared with the kind of leadership that we were seeing in the United States in those years, President Ford particularly. Trudeau was a very attractive figure on the world stage because of his personality. I can recall having a lot of fondness for him and the way he conducted himself.

Q: Did you ever get the feeling that he was used in a position of almost inferiority, coming from a relatively small state, to make comments true to himself on matters over which Canada had very little at stake?

BLAKEMORE: Yes, just a little bit particularly under Trudeau. I think he tapped into a sense of Canadian moral superiority somehow related to what we used to see from Nehru, probably a little better based in facts and analysis than Nehru. But yes, I would agree that Trudeau often felt that he was operating from a higher moral ground than his neighbor to the south. He had such style that it may have been offensive to people in Washington but it never went to the point of hurting Canadian interests that I am aware of.

Q: I was going to ask about the attitude at the desk level about the feeling towards, say Trudeau. Sometimes you get something and a leader of his nature who is making statements on things all the time that really concern the United States much more than Canada. Was there a sense of exasperation or was it that "that's just Trudeau talking"?

BLAKEMORE: Absolutely. I think there was a certain amount of resentment, not importantly. But that kind of stuff makes work for desk officers when their country's leader is talking about all sorts of issues, then the desk officers get involved and have to write position papers and all sorts of things. I think there was an attitude that he was something of a gadfly. Why didn't he just concentrate on Canadian problems?

Q: You left there in '77, then where?

BLAKEMORE: I left there in '77 and took up residence on my fourth desk in the State Department. This is consistent with my reluctance which I noted earlier to go overseas, or relative reluctance among the FSOs that I know. From '77 to '80 I was the deputy director of the Korea desk. I was responsible for political-military affairs, and supervise the first full-time economic officer on the desk. Those were the two things that I was most involved in: political-military and economics.

Q: '77 ushered in James Edward Carter and he had made certain pronouncements. I was parenthetically consul general in Seoul at the time. Mr. Carter focused our attention on our military relationship there. Could you talk about the reaction to Carter coming in and all that?

BLAKEMORE: To be specific, the President came with a campaign promise that he would get U.S. ground combat forces out of Korea.

Q: The second division.

BLAKEMORE: There was a lot of discussion about what exactly "ground combat forces" might mean. It was clear that he was going to leave the Air Force components. There were 40,000 U.S. troops in Korea, or 44,000 probably, when he came to office, and he wanted to withdraw about 30,000 of them.

The origins of this campaign promise were a little obscure I think but appeared to grow out of his personal disgust with the Korean human rights record. Park Chung Hee's government, by the time Carter came to power, had been in power for 16 years and while certainly stable and promoting miraculous economic growth, it had begun to get nasty around the political edges in terms of the heavy-handed ways it kept its opponents in check. That was the conventional wisdom about what was bugging Jimmy Carter who, after all, as the governor of Georgia probably hadn't been focusing an awful lot on foreign affairs. But human rights was something he made a lot of noise about from the beginning and of course he established the human rights bureau at the State Department when he came into office.

This plan to withdraw U.S. ground combat forces was put forward without benefit of any kind of analysis of the military impact of doing so, or the political impact for that matter. I would think it is fair to say that it really frightened those of us in the State Department and Defense Department who worked on Korea and knew something about Korea. It was very disturbing and we spent a lot of time over the succeeding two years trying to help the President find a graceful way to back down from this position which he had taken, an ill-considered position. Of course one of the problems was that he didn't think it was an ill-considered position. He was quite stubborn.

Even when an analysis of the implications of withdrawal, and how disastrous it could be militarily were pointed out to him, the President was not prepared to accept it. I was closely involved over the next two years with a lot of bureaucratic scurrying and planning and calculating on this effort, trying to get the President to change his mind. It was something that he eventually did, not terribly graciously, but he did towards the end of 1978 putting forward at the same time a proposal for tripartite talks: North and South Korea and the United States. The South Korean government mightily resisted and resented the tripartite idea, but eventually accepted as a quid pro quo for backing off troop withdrawal. It was fascinating to me to see how people responded when they thought that the President had publicly taken a stand that was disastrous to U.S. interests. State and Defense worked together reasonably well.

Q: Can we talk in as much detail as you can recall because this is a very important take? It was not a minor issue it was really a major issue. Most of us felt that if this happened it would escalate the possibility of war on the Korean peninsula considerably. Could you talk of the battle for the mind of the President, what you recall going on?

BLAKEMORE: It seems to me that the strategy had two parts to it. One was to launch a new intelligence community assessment of the order of battle issues in North and South Korea and to determine what difference it made whether we were there or not on the ground. At the same time we tried to persuade the President to slow down his timetable because by the time he came to office somebody, and I don't know who it was, had put together a fairly concrete timetable for the withdrawal of various elements of that ground combat force that was his target. That timetable was moving inexorably down the road. In order to get him to slow that down, he did finally agree to the intelligence reassessment and then it was logical not to take major units out. If you admitted that it was worthwhile to take a look at the whole thing again, that it didn't make sense to take major units out while you were looking. We did a lot of fighting over the withdrawal of minor units trying to persuade the White House that whatever unit we were looking at today, and it got fairly specific, small units ought to be allowed to stay until the intelligence assessment was complete. The mysterious part of the intelligence reassessment was an effort by the Defense Intelligence Agency to go back over old satellite imagery of North Korea and in doing so, they "discovered" significant forces that they had not known were there. Key to those significant forces were tank units. By the time we got done with this intelligence reassessment we had counted well over 2,000 tanks in North Korea, twice as many as were in the south. I think there was an increase from 600,000 to 800,000 in the estimate of the number of North Koreans under arms. You can imagine the cynicism with which this was greeted particularly since it was largely based on reassessment of old imagery rather than on new information.

There was a tremendous amount of cynicism over where those troops and those tanks came from. I don't have the answer to that. I have no idea, no sense, as to the honesty with which that reassessment of that old imagery was conducted but I do know that by steadfastly sticking to its guns and shrugging its shoulders and saying "we know it doesn't look good but this is our best estimate. Are you calling us liars or dishonorable men now?" By sticking with that new assessment, I think that is what really turned the President around. The tripartite negotiation proposal which I mentioned before was his fig leaf because that's what the South Koreans conceded. I think what really turned him around was that in the end he couldn't get past the overwhelming military superiority of the North Koreans as reflected in the new estimate.

Q: How are you in the political-military side analyzing what all this meant? I am talking about in the North. This is just a big question. Every night we'd only hear a bang which is usually one of these Black Hawk reconnaissance planes going overhead. You jump out of bed and you think, "My god, this is it." Were you trying to figure out what does Kim Il Sung want, what is going to happen? As you know this truce has gone on and continues since 1953.

BLAKEMORE: I think the fact that it has gone on since 1953 was an important consideration in getting the President to change his mind. North Korea is surely the most difficult intelligence target in the world. At least the last time I worked on Korea, we knew pathetically little about what goes on and certainly pathetically little about the dynamics of the political system or any other system, the human system, of North Korea. What we knew was based mainly on overhead imagery.

It's very easy to demonstrate that Kim Il Sung was an irrational leader. Why was he putting 20 to 25 percent of the GNP into the military? Was he really afraid South Korea and the United States were going to attack? It didn't make any sense. Lots of other things about the regime seemed very irrational to us but as you say the truce has been in place since 1953 and therefore you could say that Kim Il Sung is logical enough, rational enough, to be susceptible to deterrence, to say "No, there is too large of force arrayed against me on the southern side of the DMZ, I am going to wait a while longer before I launch some kind of an attack."

There was a strong argument of "if it ain't broke don't fix it" because with such a difficult intelligence target, it is very difficult to know which piece of the deterrence really operated on Kim's mind to say "I don't want to tangle with that". Was it the US Air Force A 10's? Was it the trip wire, the fact that if you had U.S. ground forces in a forward position some would inevitably get killed in an initial attack and therefore the whole military might of the United States could be expected to follow? Was that what deterred him? Most people would have guessed the tripwire was what deterred Kim, and therefore the President perversely wanted to withdraw what many people thought was the most effective element of deterrence, the ground combat forces. All of those things were involved.

I certainly did not do anything that would be mistaken for military analysis of the balance of forces on the peninsula. That wasn't my job. I sat in on a lot of fascinating meetings on that subject but our concern on the desk had much more to do with the management of the South Korean reaction to what was going on. You said you were in the embassy in Seoul in 1977 and found the President's declaration frightening. You had a lot of South Koreans who were more frightened than you were because you were leaving after three years and they were not going anywhere. I think managing that reaction was our major contribution.

Q: Were you at the desk consciously trying to build up the Korean self-sustaining forces, tanks, artillery, that sort of thing, so that they would eventually be able to stand on their own?

BLAKEMORE: Your memory is working better than mine. Yes. Thank you for recalling that. The modernization of the Korean forces was a five year plan that was just getting under way in 1977. Another significant argument we used in trying to get the President to back off was "do it but don't do it now, they are not ready yet." Yes, during the time that I was there, there was some major upgrading, not so much increase in quantity but in quality of Korean forces across the board. F-16s became very important in their arsenal during that period, for example.

Strangely, on many days when I came to work on the Korean desk, this was not the top issue that I had to look at because the Tong Sun Park scandal was going on simultaneously. While we were trying to persuade the President that these Koreans were good guys and that we ought to continue to stick our security neck out despite their human rights record, Congress was uncovering the extremely ugly evidence of corrupt Korean influencing of U.S. congressmen. Tong Sun Park was the Korean point man in that effort. It seemed pretty clear to me that he was being funded by the Korean government. I don't think that it was ever clearly demonstrated but Tong Sun Park didn't have the kind of fortune required to spread money around the way it was being spread around. It was designed to prevent exactly the sort of thing that they were faced with, the precipitous withdrawal of U.S. forces.

Q: Of course our congressional representatives, a number of them, did not cover themselves in glory. They sort of rolled over their backs and took the money.

BLAKEMORE: Yes, Park had some very willing collaborators.

Q: A lady named Susie something or other.

BLAKEMORE: She was in Tip O'Neill's office, right?

Q: Yes, something like that.

BLAKEMORE: She was a Korean American. It really created a very negative impression of Korea at a time when Korea could not afford, on the security front, to have that negative impression.

Q: Did you get involved in the negotiations to have an inquiry of Tong Sun Park?

BLAKEMORE: No, that was already underway by the time I came to the desk.

Q: I got on it a little. I had to swear a man, and I remember meeting our assistant attorney. It was a man named Giuliani who came out there, who is now mayor of New York.

BLAKEMORE: That's right. I had forgotten that he was involved in that business.

Q: How did you find the American military? You say they were working in solid concert or something with the State Department on this thing. Was everybody pretty well agreed that this whole thing was a bad idea?

BLAKEMORE: Yes. There really wasn't any disagreement. The only disagreement between State and Defense would be over tactics on a particular issue. Richard Holbrooke was the Assistant Secretary for East Asia at the time. A man of great antennae and skill who was very good at public relations and management of the Congress, Congressional relations. Occasionally I think Holbrooke's sensitivity to Congressional reactions to various steps would sometimes put us at cross purposes with the military. I have a lot of respect for the military from my entire exposure to Korea and certainly from this period. They had strong feelings and they backed them up very effectively.

Q: There was a general whose name I forget, who spoke out.

BLAKEMORE: Singlaub.

Q: Yes, General Singlaub who was the deputy military commander in Korea. Could you explain about that?

BLAKEMORE: Again, that happened before I got to the desk. He spoke out, as I recall, very bluntly in public against the withdrawal plan and he was removed as a result. He came to symbolize the right wing opposition to the President's plans. This was a three ring circus. The withdrawal of U.S. troops and the Tong Sun Park scandal. The third ring of the circus was that Jimmy Carter had set up the human rights bureau in the State Department with Pat Derian as the first Assistant Secretary. She was a very effective, acerbic, energetic woman who thought, probably with the encouragement of, if not the President, then of at least some people in the White House, that Korea was a logical initial target. What were we doing in bed with a country with such an ugly human rights record? That was the third ring of the circus that the desk tried to manage and I spent a lot of time putting out fires.

I can remember the struggle over the initial annual report card on human rights in Korea which came out during my tenure, the effort to get a balanced presentation. It was not unnecessarily insulting but had no context to it. Human rights issues tend to polarize people into very strong views. The Pat Derian Human Rights Bureau didn't see a lot of gray it was mostly black and white, mostly black. It was three years of feeling quite beleaguered actually. In the same storm-tossed boat were some very competent people from the Korean Embassy one of whom later became the Korean ambassador to the United States, Park Kun Whoo. A very competent man and it was an interesting exercise working extremely closely with the Korean embassy.

Q: Do you think they understood the complex American politics of this? It is sometimes very difficult for somebody to understand.

BLAKEMORE: Yes they did, I don't have any doubt about it. The political counselor, Park, and Ambassador Kim Yong Shik, who was ambassador during most of this period, and was an extremely experienced Korean diplomat, a former foreign minister, yes they understood. Great nuances perhaps not, but they certainly knew what they were caught up in and they knew that they had to work together with us to encourage the government of Korea to swallow some of its feelings of outrage and resentment and not add fuel to the fire by firing off a lot of public broadsides. In that they were extremely effective, very effective.

Q: During this time here you are defending a country which had a bad human rights record and a military president and all that, did you find yourself running into I don't know what you want to call it, but within the White House and within the staff of Congress the equivalent to strong peace proponents, anti-militaristic younger people who came out of the '60s? Often they end up in the White House doing political things or in the staff in Congress. Did you run across this group?

BLAKEMORE: To some extent yes. I don't know where the missionary-like fervor for human rights issue came from. I don't know whether those people were '60s radicals who had toned down but not very much, or not. I can remember though interacting extensively with Senator Ted Kennedy's staff. The senator was extremely interested in human rights issues. His attention had been attracted to some problems, I think mainly by Methodist missionaries who had gotten to his office in some way. The problems were real, I wouldn't want to minimize them. In that case the Kennedy staffers were able to, in the end, temper the human rights concerns with the security concerns. I had feared that they were going to be sort of what you had said, crusaders for improved human rights conditions and not interested in other subjects. That was not the case. They showed some very nice balance in the end I thought.

Q: Do you have any feel for the two ambassadors there during thtime, Richard Schneider and Bill Gleysteen?

BLAKEMORE: Yes, of course. I though Schneider was a very effective operator. He had good relations with the U.S. military for the most part. He was a flamboyant man.

Q: He didn't get along too well with Richard Stilwell, the militarcommander. They were good opponents.

BLAKEMORE: That sort of tarnished the end of Schneider's time in Korea. A very knowledgeable man on military affairs and also on Korean affairs. A good guy too with Korea. I had a much more personal relationship with Bill Gleysteen because my next assignment was to be his political counselor. In terms of personality, a very different man from Schneider, much more low-key. He was effective in dealing with the U.S. military presence in Seoul but not in any confrontational way, certainly not public confrontation. Gleysteen is a true gentleman and a diplomat whom one could very well model a career after.

Q: Did you get at all involved in human rights?

BLAKEMORE: Oh, yes. It was not possible to work on the desk and noget involved in human rights.

Q: I had the feeling that human rights were sort of a new thing. There had been aspects of human rights before. Human rights burst forward and if you are sitting in Seoul 30 miles away from all those North Koreans, human rights kind of moves down the scale. Certainly Richard Schneider viewed the human rights side with a certain amount of, I won't say disdain, he really wasn't very interested. He had a labor officer, John LaMazza, who was trying to do his duty and report and it was an uncomfortable relationship. Did you pick that up?

BLAKEMORE: Yes. It is always awkward if what the desk perceives as the political reality in Washington is not accepted or shared by the embassy. I know that we had more trouble with the human rights bureau because of Schneider's disinterest than we would have if he had at least been doing some more posturing about it, saying some of the right things and then saying "but." That course correction was clearly made when Bill Gleysteen got to Seoul. Partly because that is the kind of man he is. But also partly because, as the senior deputy in the East Asia Bureau he was the one at that level who was getting all the crap from the human rights people. He saw that there was a way that the embassy could help reduce some of it and then he asked them to do that.

Q: It was one of the, you might say, more confrontational times in some ways between the embassy and the President.

BLAKEMORE: I think it was, on the combination of troop withdrawal and human rights, yes.

Q: You would not have been there during the tree incident on the border, on the DMZ?

BLAKEMORE: That was in '76 I believe.

Q: How about the sudden demise of Park Chung Hee? Was that during your watch?

BLAKEMORE: It was. It was what we referred to with gallows humor as the shoot out at the ROK Corral when Park Chung Hee was assassinated by his intelligence chief at a dinner party. Yes, I was on the desk. It was a frightening time because the North Korean reaction was always so difficult to predict. The concern was that with so many forward deployed forces and the recent disagreement in the United States about whether Korea was worth supporting or not, then with the demise of the guy who had been in power for 18 years in Seoul, there was a lot of concern that that would constitute an invitation to Kim Il Sung to start an adventure of some size. We deployed a carrier to the Sea of Japan immediately and made some very tough sounding statements about how no one should see this as an opportunity to move, and obviously it was a successful response. Maybe we didn't need that response. Maybe Kim was never any closer to moving than he had been before the assassination, but it was a very tense week.

Q: What was the initial analysis of why the head of the Korean intelligence agency would kill his boss?

BLAKEMORE: I don't know what we thought the reason was. Park had certainly become more and more difficult for everyone to deal with and that certainly included his major lieutenants like the intelligence chief. I don't recall what we thought at the time and I don't have any good explanation for it now. There was no provision for succession. It was really a shot in the dark. It was a great surprise to everyone and precipitated what was then called the "Seoul Spring". Harking back to the Prague Spring of 1968 when everything appeared to be heading towards a great liberalization.

Q: The assassination took place I think October 26, 1981?

BLAKEMORE: 1979. The three Kims as we called them, three guys named Kim stepped forward and began jockeying for the opportunity to succeed Park Chung Hee. There was a caretaker government. Everybody knew there was going to be a caretaker government in place immediately after the assassination. Kim Chong Pil was a long-time ally and lieutenant of Parks', a skilled politician whom many people assumed would be the front-runner. Kim Dae Jung was a south westerner from the Cholla area. His origins were a strike against him in terms of being freely elected to national office in Korea because of the prejudice against that region in the country. He was a liberal, outspoken fellow who it appears the Park government had tried to kidnap and murder in 1975 or 1976. He was the second Kim. The third Kim was Kim Yong Sam. Another southerner but from the right part of the south, from Pusan. We thought, "This is great and we are going to have the breakthrough in political maturity to match the economic maturity which Korea had gained over the last 20 years. Park was a good guy in many ways but thank God we will get out from underneath this human rights problem."

Then Chun Doo Hwan stepped forward and stopped all of that on the 12th of December, 1979. He was a Korean Military Academy graduate, a 3 star general at the time that he took over. He came from an intelligence position which gave him a good jumping off place for the coup that took place. U.S. forces were essentially frozen. I don't know what they could have done anyway but they simply sat and watched. There was some effort on the part of the embassy to talk him out of his precipitous move. Discussions went on for a few days as I recall, but in the end it was obvious that he had planned this all along. Since the assassination, that is what he was going to do and he could not be dissuaded from it. He was going to bet that we would not play our ace and withdraw our security support.

I was watching from Washington and I found the events and our response to them dismaying. I can recall sitting in an interagency meeting chaired by Richard Holbrooke and I think Rich Armitage was there from Defense and Mike Armacost was there from the National Security Council staff. The issue on the table was what, if anything, we were willing to do to dissuade this guy from just smashing this Seoul Spring and taking over. (It wasn't spring as you pointed out.) The answer was that we weren't willing to do anything. I can remember being quite mouthy about that. I was vocal in the meetings, saying that we ought to have the courage of our convictions and that this was a golden opportunity to help Korea move in a different direction politically. I was essentially shouted down on the basis of security considerations. It was too risky and the only thing that we could do to influence Chun Doo Hwan would be to pull the security umbrella away from him and that was too risky to do that, so we stood by and watched. He consolidated his power through the spring of 1980 leading up to the Kwang Ju incident.

Q: You were still in Washington. Let's talk about Kwang Ju. Firstly explain what it was.

BLAKEMORE: Kim Dae Jung was one of the three Kims vying for power in a period of time when it looked as if an elected government might be possible. In fact, if you were good at kidding yourself or if your glasses were rose-colored, you could believe that that period of liberalization and movement towards a free election took up much of the spring of 1980. It was clear to us and I think to the people who were a little more hard headed in Korea, that December 12, 1979 was the end of that. But Chung chose to exercise power through the interim government for the first several months. He did not simply step forward and have himself anointed president until late spring. By May it was clear that was what was going to happen. Anybody with eyes could see that was going to happen. I can't remember precipitating incidents anymore.

In May of 1980, the large southwestern city of Kwang Ju in the south Cholla province essentially revolted, I guess you could say, against the central government. It started with young people demonstrating and the military garrison in the area was essentially nudged out of town.

After the military withdrew, they weren't physically driven out but they thought it was wise to withdraw from the town, a stalemate ensued for several days. I can't remember exactly for how long. During this time people were frantically trying to figure out what might be done to restore the status quo ante without slaughtering a lot of people. Bill Gleysteen, as I recall, spent a lot of time talking to General Chun Doo Hwan about the dangers in U.S. public opinion, let alone on the ground in Korea, of any kind of a precipitous military response to the Kwang Ju incident as it was called. In the end his efforts were to no avail.

One of Chung's Korean Military Academy classmates who was the commander of special forces sent special forces down to Kwang Ju and they essentially took the city back by force and a lot of people were killed. The official number of what "a lot" might mean was set after a commission of inquiry by the Korean government at something over 200. The opponents were sure that it was well over 1,000. There were a lot of eyewitness reports from foreign missionaries who were there. It was a mess. It was an ugly, nasty situation of Koreans killing Koreans, with the military killing essentially unarmed civilians. The civilians had taken the guns from the armory but they were no match for these special forces.

It is going to take a long time for Korea to get over Kwang Ju particularly because the victims were citizens of a part of the country that has a long history of being discriminated against for reasons which are about as obscure as that kind of discrimination always has been anywhere in the world. If you know any Cholla people you know that there is nothing about them that merits that sort of attitude.

A great fallout from the Kwang Ju incident from the United States perspective was the widespread misunderstanding in Korea that because Korean forces are under the operational command of the U.S. commanders should the North Koreans attack, that must be the case in a domestic squabble like Kwang Ju too. Therefore the American general would have been able to stop the Korean forces from going back into Kwang Ju if he wanted to. If he didn't stop them, that meant that the American government was in cahoots with Chung Doo Hwan and his obvious rise and march towards the presidency. Not only that, here is an incident of local democracy that we went along with smashing, this showed what we thought of the Cholla people, and on and on and on.

A great conspiracy theory emerged that I am sure is still common in Korea. Of course since the government has now been liberalized I am sure it is much less of a sore point. We spent a lot of time in the arcane business of trying to explain that for domestic purposes, Korean troops were never under the command of the U.S. commander. Besides that, the special forces who did all of the dirty work, even under wartime circumstances were not under the command of the U.S. Nobody wanted to hear any of that stuff. We said it over and over again but it didn't make any difference. Kwang Ju did a lot of damage to the public perception of the United States in Korea. I don't know whether the damage persists today but it stayed a problem for a long time.

Q: What was the response from Congress?

BLAKEMORE: I can't recall that there was any concerted response from Congress. There were some people who could always be relied upon to raise a lot of noise about something like this, like Senator Kennedy. I don't recall any hard to manage Congressional response.

Q: Did the media go after you or was this taken care of by the public affairs office?

BLAKEMORE: Oh, no, we had a lot of media interest. I think it is fair to say that the western media in general were able to understand the distinction and the operational control arrangements in a way that the Koreans chose not to understand. The western media did not proceed on the premise that we could have stopped it if we wanted to. I think there was a feeling though that the United States could have interfered with Chun's inexorable movement towards becoming president. This leads back to what I said my own position was in Washington councils after the 12th of December when Chung became more visible in his objectives.

Q: Is there anything else we should cover? When did you leave the Korean desk?

BLAKEMORE: In July of 1980.

Q: So you went to Korea then?

BLAKEMORE: I went to Korea and I had Richard Holbrooke to thank for that. I had been assigned to some dull seeming job in the European bureau and someone else had been assigned as political counselor in Seoul. Holbrooke decided that he thought I would do a good job in that position. He asked me and I said of course. I wasn't the right grade. I was a grade too junior. It was an OC position and I was an FSO-1. Dick essentially forced me through the personnel system, and worse than that I feared was the fact that the person that personnel wanted and who was moved out of the job was also Ambassador Bill Gleysteen's choice. I went off to Korea with a little trepidation about what that might mean for me. I need not have worried.

Before I went, Bill Gleysteen was back in Washington for something and he and I got together. He went out of his way to assure me that he understood exactly what had happened and that I hadn't engineered it. He told me that he had confidence in my ability from our working together in Washington the previous two years and let's go forward. It was something that I greatly appreciated.

Q: You were in Korea from '80 to '83. How did you find the situation in Korea? Kwang Ju had been how long ago?

BLAKEMORE: Kwang Ju had taken place in May and I got there in July. Things were buttoned up pretty tightly. Just before I got there for example, 81 or 82 professors had signed a really quite innocuous declaration of academic freedom. The government's response, and we were still operating with Chun as the puppet behind the interim government, was to ban all 82 of those people from doing academic work. They were no longer able to earn their livelihoods as teachers. I mention that because I had a very close friend who was affected but it was also typical of how tightly buttoned down things were in that period. It was two years at least before there was any kind of relaxation of, tolerance of, anything that might even resemble dissent. The answer to your question is that it was a pretty grim time politically in Korea.

Q: How did you find the relationship between the embassy and the government?

BLAKEMORE: Distant, cool, correct. There was no lack of communication but Gleysteen had established a fairly cool interaction.

Q: Were you there when the Carter visit came?

BLAKEMORE: No. Carter visited in 1978 briefly at the tail end of a visit to Japan. That put the last nail in the coffin of the troop withdrawal plan. I was on the desk at that time, not in Korea.

Q: I think but I can't remember if it was an interview with either Hal Stern or Paul Cleveland talking about in a way the whole matter was thrashed out in a car with Carter and I don't know who else. There was a great argument while the Korean driver was just sitting there. Everyone was waiting for him to come out of the car and they were arguing over it.

BLAKEMORE: I have a vague recollection of that but I am sure that Paul had a lot more details than I do. I remember now. Carter was a reluctant, reluctant supporter of Korea all the way through.

Q: You get out there in 1980. How did you operate as a political counselor? You are supposed to be glad handing those and meeting people.

BLAKEMORE: I did the things that political counselors do. I tried to ingratiate myself with the colonels at the gate. It was obvious that because the relationship was going to go on in a very complex and extensive way, we had to have ways of talking to each other. I don't think my behavior was any different. I think what was different was the other people's behavior. These colonels particularly had not been through this kind of a drill before. They weren't sure why I was coming to see them or how influential I might be or what they might safely say to me about anything.

Q: When you're talking about colonels who are you talking about?

BLAKEMORE: I'm talking about Chun's personal staff in the Blue House. Hun Hwa Pyong was the most influential of those men. A charming guy, but he and his colleagues didn't know what they were doing in this non-military environment. While they were typically gracious to me at first, they certainly were not willing to be developed as contacts for me. They weren't going to let that happen for the very reasons that I wanted those contacts. I wanted information about what was going on and they didn't want to tell me.

Of course the relationships with the Foreign Ministry were close and extensive. Park Kun Woo, the man that I had worked so closely with when he was political counselor in Washington and I was deputy on the desk, became head of the Americas Department in the Foreign Ministry sometime during that first year or so. That was fine. In many ways we were shut out from the kind of intimate relationship that we had been accustomed to. Fortunately, Park Kun Woo had no problem with an intimate relationship with an American diplomat, or with any of his people having an intimate relationship.

Q: What did you find that the role of the CIA was before and after the assassination? From your perspective, how would you appraise this?

BLAKEMORE: I don't think I can say anything intelligent about before, but after the CIA was useful to the rest of us in the sense that they had a better understanding of army personnel (or personnel) politics and relationships and who was beholden to whom within the army. A matter of no great consequence to anybody before but now it suddenly became very important because Chun put military people in all of the important jobs: generals as ministers and colonels as operating people at various levels. We, the State people, didn't know any of them. The kind of cultivation of the military that political officers might do in a country like Thailand, for example, or Indonesia, had not historically been done in Korea because the U.S. military had all the interaction with those people that the U.S. government needed, thank you very much, and of course they were right until the change.

Q: Were they frozen out too?

BLAKEMORE: They weren't frozen out, but they were extremely reluctant to talk to their military colleagues about anything but military issues, strictly business that was appropriate to people in uniforms on both sides of the table. It was hard for them to be expected by the rest of us to relate to these same colonels in a different way than they always had. They didn't want to ruin their relationship by "G-2ing our allies" as they would say. It was strained, it was cold and very unlike the traditional U.S.-Korea atmosphere.

Q: Usually in many ways they were much more alike, more blunt than any other oriental. That's my experience.

BLAKEMORE: Let me say something before I forget it. You like to talk about policy and I like to talk about personal reactions. Let me give you a personal reaction about what it was like to live in Korea in 1980 as a foreigner compared with 1974 or 1971 when we got there the first time. In that period of time that I was here in Washington with the Canadians and the Bangladeshis and the Jordanians, a huge number of Korean academics who had come to the United States and had forgotten to go home, looked back home and said, gee there are some interesting opportunities there. I think I will go back and try my hand as professor, businessman, economist in the government, even politician.

When we came back in 1980 we were quickly in contact, through tennis as it turns out, with a group of 18 or 20 couples who met this criterion that I just set out. They stayed in the States, after graduate school, and then decided to go back. They were an absolutely delightful set of people for my wife and me to be around and were atypical of Koreans in many ways most important of which was that the wives spoke English and were accustomed to talking to men other than their husbands. If you had a dinner, you could have what we would think of as a more relaxed and enjoyable dinner. It was a real pleasure to find this group of people. Several of them are still good friends many years later.

This group of people turned out to be wonderful contacts for me in a professional sense. Among this group of people who happily coexisted with each other on the social level were a signer of the academic freedom declaration who was a real outcast as a result, several professors and people who were with the Korean CIA. A very interesting collection of people.

Q: One of the things we talked about with Park Chung Hee was that while not an economist himself, he really took an interest in the development of the economic world. He made sure that corruption did not deviate the growth of Korea and that people when given a task would do it and relied heavily on foreign trained economists and all that. Did you see a difference?

BLAKEMORE: Yes I think so. First of all it was a much easier task. The engine was running at high speed already by the time Chun took power. It is easier to keep it running than it is to get it started. I don't think he was as interested in economic issues as Park. He was more interested in corruption, I think, than Park was. Of course he has been publicly disgraced since he left power on the corruption issue and spent some time in jail. His younger brother was publicly disgraced while I was there while Chun was still president.

I hesitate to talk about Korean corruption as if I or anybody in the U.S. government really understood the extent and the nature of it because I keep seeing new revelations about it. For example in the last week the press has been talking about the way bank loans are allocated among the major Korean conglomerates which has helped precipitate the economic crisis of the last few weeks. This has always gone on from the beginning. A lot of it, I think, probably could be labeled as corruption from our perspective. I guess there has always been a lot more of it than I realized and while it was more visible under Chun occasionally. I doubt if it was any more of a problem than it had been under Park Chung Hee.

Q: What about the political leaders, the three Kims and all that? Did you have much to do with all of that?

BLAKEMORE: Yes. Kim Jung Pil, the Park loyalist kind of faded, disappeared, and became inactive. The other two Kims tried to maintain some kind of presence. Kim Dae Jung was under house arrest for at least the first year of my time there. In the second and third year, both he and Kim Yong Sam came to lunch at my house a couple of times. In a very quiet, private setting like that they were willing to talk about what was going on. The trouble was they didn't know what was going on. They had no connection with the government and virtually nothing was going on in the opposition area, really nothing at all.

Q: What about newspapers?

BLAKEMORE: Very heavily controlled. There were a lot of planted stories. When I was in Korea the first time, the government owned a major English language daily and that's where you found the government line. If you wanted to know exactly what the government thought about any issue it was there but the other papers exercised a significant amount of freedom within limits which they understood pretty clearly. Certainly nothing that appeared to be in aid of North Korea was tolerable in the Park years either.

Under Chun it was a very insidious form of censorship. That is censorship without guidelines so that editors were blindfolded and when they screwed up they could be jailed. Nobody told them what they couldn't put in print but when the government didn't like something they would be shut down for a few days and the editors would be thrown in jail. Some of them were beaten up in the process. That didn't have to happen very many times before the papers became very tame.

Q: How about every spring, were you watching the students?

BLAKEMORE: Oh, yes, but that is sort of a rite of spring in Korea. It goes on under the democratic governments as well these days. I don't think they were particularly active during the early Chung years, I think they were a little more cautious because people were jailed and disappeared for long periods of time.

The next major event in my career in Korea happened in the spring of 1981 when Bill Gleysteen went home and President Ronald Reagan sent out a South Carolina Republican loyalist by the name of Richard Dixie Walker to be his ambassador to Korea. Dixie, a very likable man in many ways, was an academic from the University of South Carolina with excellent credentials in East Asian affairs. He was very conservative in his assessment of East Asian things with Nationalist Chinese connections and that sort of thing and a complete neophyte in the world of diplomacy.

It was a rude shock to me and to a lot of other people in the embassy to make that shift from Bill Gleysteen the consummate professional, to somebody who knew a lot about East Asia here and there but didn't know what the hell he was doing inside of an embassy. The conservative credentials meant something although we didn't know exactly what in terms of reporting on human rights for example. There was a state of confusion that wasn't unique to Korea in the early Reagan years as people were faced with things like the Congressional mandate to produce a human rights report. You knew damn well the president didn't want to see any of that. So we were all puzzled as to what we were doing with these conservatives.

I developed, I think, a reasonably good working relationship with Dixie and working with first John Monjo as a DCM, and then Paul Cleveland. We were able in almost all cases temper Dixie's gut responses to particular things that happened so that the embassy did not appear to be shooting from the hip, at least not very often. What happened was, as I recall, that he began to separate his own reactions to things and provide them in special cables to the president or to whoever else he was sending them to. Therefore he did not feel the need to color the embassy's run of the mill reporting with his somewhat more conservative slant on the world, which was a good solution. It worked out well that way.

Q: When you say a conservative slant, a conservative slant does not necessarily mean enjoying a military dictatorship or was he more comfortable with it?

BLAKEMORE: That would be a nice diplomatic way to put it. He was a lot more comfortable with the Chun government than I was and more than Paul was. More to the point, he had not had to shift gears as dramatically as I had to in the change from Carter to Reagan. My personal predilection to be cool towards this military government was fully reflected in the instructions from Washington under Carter. Now under Reagan there was kind of an atmosphere of "what's all the fuss about? This guy is doing a good job. He's got a stable government, the economy is booming still. What's the problem? What is all the hostility about? Let's be a little warmer and get a little closer to these guys." Dixie was all for that and I think in a sense he was captured by some people who were aware of that and wanted to make sure that he was extremely well treated by the Chun government.

Q: Were these Koreans?

BLAKEMORE: Yes. I don't think it really created a problem but as I say, he didn't have to make that major course correction that I did and others did in the way we bridged the transition in U.S. presidents.

Q: What did you do about the human rights reports?

BLAKEMORE: I don't remember the specifics. I can remember that the front office of the embassy was much more interested in them after Dixie came than before. Gleysteen was interested but his interest was to make sure that what we were saying was really founded. "How do you know what you are saying here?" Walker's attitude was a little more like "Do we have to say this? This isn't really important. Why is it phrased in this way?" Political in a sense that he was more attuned to, to be fair to him, to make it palatable to the new president and his men. The new president wasn't going to read it obviously. Carter no doubt did read it. Carter was a tremendous nit picker and micro manager. So that was a major change for me.

Q: During that time were there any other things happening in Korea? Did you find for example that Walker would listen to you?

BLAKEMORE: He always was willing to give me a fair hearing. Actually it was a fairly quiet time politically in Korea. On the security side there were incidents but not anything really alarming. There was a steady buildup of South Korean capabilities during that period with the improvement of their air force particularly and their tank fleet. U.S. forces were beefed up. The A-10 anti-tank aircraft came in during that period. It was a formidable weapon in the Korean context. The tanks that the U.S. forces had were upgraded nicely during that period. In terms of comparison with the previous three years ending with the 12th of December 1979, it was a quiet three years.

Q: Maybe we better quit at this period and we will pick it up thnext time in 1983. Where did you go?

BLAKEMORE: Political-Military Bureau.

Q: We'll pick that up then.

Today is the 30th of January 1998. In 1983 you are off to thpolitical-military bureau?

BLAKEMORE: That's right. I left Korea.

Q: You were there from when to when?

BLAKEMORE: In the political-military bureau from July '83 to Jul'85.

Q: What was your assignment there?

BLAKEMORE: I was the head of the office of security assistance and sales. As the name suggests, there are two very separate functions. Security assistance meaning military aid in all of its forms, both financial and in training. The State Department has the statutory authority to sign off on allocation of military assistance to foreign countries. As you might imagine, the State Department does that job with an awful lot of support, direction, guidance and quibbling from the Department of Defense. State couldn't begin to do the job because it doesn't have the technical expertise. In addition the office was responsible for coordinating U.S. government positions on weapon sales to foreign countries meaning the essentially political decision as to whether it was in the U.S. national interest for a particular country to have a new fighter, a new ground-to-air missile, a new air-to-air missile, whatever it might be. I really thought that for the first time, perhaps the only time in my career, I was in the center of a significant issue and on a global basis.

Q: Before you got absorbed with the problems, did you have a philosophy about this because one can always say that you are the merchants of death in a way putting too much hardware into countries for limited political measures or to help the Pentagon get rid of its equipment or something like that? Did you go in with any preconceived ideas before you got involved in it?

BLAKEMORE: I certainly did. I can't claim that I had thought about the matter a great deal before I got the assignment. I never served in PM before but I was aware of some weapon sales issues certainly from my Korean experience working in a country that was a major recipient of weapons systems from the United States. Yes, I had a rather idealistic outlook I think on arm sales. I thought arm sales should be minimized and that they should be looked at to be certain that they weren't destabilizing. They should be necessary and not sophisticated toys for the leadership but something that actually had a military justification that made sense from the United States policy point of view. They should not be used as tools of foreign policy in the sense of "we need to improve our relationship with country X so let's let them have the F-16." As I say, I felt idealistic about that along those lines but it didn't last very long. I never changed my feelings about it so it wound up being a - bitter would be melodramatic - disillusioning experience to be in charge of that office for two years.

Q: Can you describe when you arrived there as the new boy on the block, the culture of PM, particularly your office but also the rest of PM?

BLAKEMORE: The culture of PM at the time of my arrival was heavily influenced by the fact that it was being run at the Assistant Secretary level by an active duty rear admiral by the name of Jonathan Howe. The inevitably military flavor of the bureau was increased by having an active duty military man run the place. Howe drove his staff unmercifully. He occasionally slept on a little cot behind the sofa in his office. It didn't require a particular world crisis. If we were talking about a Middle East war going on at the time that would be one thing but the man lived for crisis. He was a very political admiral and was very much in favor of 100 percent more effort on the part of his staff for a one percent improvement in the product. That may not be exactly the direction of your question, but when you talk about the culture of the bureau, that is what I think about is Admiral Howe. He was a political admiral. He almost never served in the fleet and had been a military aide in the White House. A very difficult man to work for I thought.

Aside from that there was a technical atmosphere in the bureau, inevitably I think, that it took me quite a while to catch up with. I was immediately required to look at the proposed sale of weapon systems that I didn't even recognize, or know what their function was, or certainly what generation of technology they might represent. I had a lot of learning and catching up to do. It was a little scary but also fascinating. I found that weapons systems are very interesting things to me. I enjoyed learning the technology and the differences among various kinds of systems.

I found very quickly that desperate American ambassadors around the world frequently proposed approval of controversial weapon systems sales in order to ingratiate the United States, or perhaps themselves, with the ruling government. The F-16 was the hot fighter aircraft of the day and still 15 years later it is a formidable airplane. We were talking about the F-16A at the time. During my tenure of course we sold it to Korea, which was not really a political decision. It seemed to make sense in the balance of power on the peninsula. We also sold it to Indonesia as I recall and Pakistan and some other places that made less sense, Thailand. It gave me a very uncomfortable feeling to make weapon systems sales decisions on a political basis, particularly when that was obviously not the intent of the relevant governing legislation.

Q: The F-16 was mainly a product of Texas was it?

BLAKEMORE: That's right.

Q: You had a vice president from Texas. Did sort of the politics owhere things were produced play at all at your level?

BLAKEMORE: Not in a way that was visible at my level. I think General Dynamics was a very important mover and shaker in Washington at that time, but it appeared to me that their influence came as much from their role as a major supplier to the U.S. Air Force as from the fact that the F-16 happened to be assembled in Texas. I think for good reasons the Air Force was very much in favor of selling more airplanes abroad because that meant that each new airplane the Air Force bought would cost less. It was good planning from their point of view. General Dynamics was a very frequent visitor in my office.

Q: With these weapons systems, let's talk about the areas that gave you problems. You mentioned Pakistan and Indonesia. One kind of wonders, particularly Indonesia, Pakistan may have had a so-called Soviet threat.

BLAKEMORE: Pakistan had another problem and that was that we were holding evidence of their efforts to develop an independent nuclear deterrent, underground nuclear capability, and that made it hard to sell them weapon systems. There was a lot of painful looking at the evidence which we had about the nuclear program in Pakistan to see how we could characterize it so we could still sell them advanced aircraft.

Your question was about other areas. I can remember in the early mid-'80s it became fashionable to regard the Horn of Africa, particularly Sudan and Somalia, as a crucial part of the world strategically. It puzzled me then and it puzzles me now but as a result of the fact that that was a very widespread feeling, we poured a lot of money into those two countries during my tenure. The issue there was not highly sophisticated weapon systems, it was the allocation among potential recipients of a fairly limited amount of military assistance money. Somalia and Sudan got a very big share relative to their size and in my opinion their importance to U.S. interests at the time. Pakistan was a major recipient and of course the jackpot was held by Israel and Egypt.

Q: Was that sort of off-limits for you?

BLAKEMORE: Israel and Egypt?

Q: Yes.

BLAKEMORE: Certainly in terms of the amounts of military assistance it was off-limits. The levels were set in stone in the Camp David accords and I think routinely built into legislation appropriating the money in military assistance every year. The amounts were off-limits. The more interesting question with Israel and Egypt was the decisions about which technology we would sell them. I learned a lot about Israeli power and influence in Washington. It was really quite remarkable to me that they seemed to be able to get virtually any system they wanted whether it made sense in terms of the balance of power in the Middle East. There wasn't a lot of calculation of that.

Q: Was it one of those things that you were told don't tilt with this particular windmill?

BLAKEMORE: That's right and I did some minor tilting but never with much success. There was another aspect to the Israeli relationship which I found troublesome and that was that every time we sell a military system to a foreign country, we require them to sign an assurance that they will not retransfer that to another country without our advance permission. There was a lot of evidence drifting around that the Israelis had sold some old American equipment in Latin America. There was very solid looking intelligence to that effect. That was not to be discussed. As one of the deputy assistant secretaries said to me at the time when we were talking about Israel, "don't ask questions that you don't want to know the answer to." A very interesting lesson in the power of that lobby.

Q: What about Latin America? It has been sort of a cornerstone of American policy to keep Latin America from turning into an arms bazaar. For years we tried to keep jets out of Latin America. During this '83 to '85 time, how was Latin America treated?

BLAKEMORE: If you are talking relatively, we had more restraint in Latin America than we did anywhere else in the world. El Salvador was getting a lot of stuff, a lot of aid in terms of financial amounts and a lot of equipment but not particularly sophisticated. You may remember that President Jimmy Carter had broken the long-time policy of no advance jet sales to Latin America by selling the Venezuelans the F-16. It might have been maybe four or five years before I got there. We were quite restrained with Latin America. There was a lot less effective pressure brought to bear there than elsewhere with the exception of whatever El Salvador appeared to want. The odd country at the time was Argentina in the aftermath of the Falklands War.

Q: Was there any attempt to use military sales pressure, if you feel it, on the political desks to say: Chile unless you have a better form of government we are not going to sell you this or that, and other places too?

BLAKEMORE: I don't remember it being particularly effective in some places you can think of that had unattractive governments like the Sudan, Somalia, Korea, Taiwan, Indonesia. The less strategic a country is considered to be, the more likely we are to follow our human rights principle in making arms sales decisions, I would say. But if the Pentagon and others believed that the country was strategic, like Somalia, it didn't matter. It didn't appear to matter what the human rights record might have been.

Q: Why Somalia and in particular Sudan?

BLAKEMORE: The strategic position on the Red Sea with regard to possible conflict over the Saudi oil fields I think. I think that was the rationale.

Q: Ethiopia at that time was a Soviet hot spot?

BLAKEMORE: That's right and so there was a certain balancing act with regards to Ethiopia as well.

Q: Later we became involved in trying to put down essentially tribal unrest in Somalia with no great success. One of the accusations is we should be in there because we gave them all this equipment although the pictures I saw showed them running around with AK-47s, a Soviet product. What about what we were putting in there in those days?

BLAKEMORE: I don't have any memory of what we were selling Somalia. As I said before, Somalia and Sudan came to my attention not because it was anything unusual in terms of the equipment we were selling but because of the amounts of military assistance money they were getting. There was certainly not enough to go around for legitimate purposes I think. They got more than their share.

Q: When you say military assistance money, what does this mean? One always thinks that with military assistance you've got to buy something and the United States has got pretty good stuff. It really meant buying military equipment, didn't it?

BLAKEMORE: Yes but military assistance means financing. Military assistance has to do with financing not with equipment itself. There are different forms of military assistance available. Essentially three as I recall: there is MAP, I don't know what the acronym stands for but it may be Military Assistance Program, but it is grant money.

Q: Which is used for what?

BLAKEMORE: Equipment purchases. Also used for equipment purchases is FMS money. It is for military sales but it is financing and financing on such long terms, -it has been a long time but I want to say 30 year terms- which makes it virtually free if you assume normal rates of inflation.

The final piece and in many ways the most interesting and valuable I think is IMET, International Military Education and Training is that acronym. A very small amount of money but money that will allow foreign military officers to come to the United States for various kinds of training. I think over the years, this is the argument that has been used and it is often true, that it's used in countries where the military has an undue influence in the political scene or maybe is in charge of the political scene. It is in the interest of the United States to expose officers to the values that are taught at the Command and General Staff College for example in Kansas. That is the kind of thing that the IMET money goes for.

Q: The other money that you are talking about, the MAP and FMS, essentially all this money is supposed to end up as equipment, isn't it?

BLAKEMORE: That's right.

Q: Was your office keeping track of what they were buying?

BLAKEMORE: No that was the Pentagon's function. If a country, let's say the Sudan in those days might have received 40 million dollars a year in military assistance in MAP grant money, all of the weaponry that they planned to buy with that money had to be approved by the State Department. It was mostly non-controversial stuff, small arms and tents and whatever. The actual keeping track of it, the accounting, the purchasing, is handled in the Pentagon by the DSAA, Defense Security Assistance Agency. They do all the purchasing on behalf of the foreign government.

Q: Did you get caught in the buy that happened even later on during the Gulf War of the bureau of human rights saying "No, you can't sell gas masks because that is used for police to put out tear gas. If the army and the police have tear gas and the good demonstrators don't, you are helping them." This idea of helping police action, was this a problem for you?

BLAKEMORE: It came up occasionally. I can recall I think Guatemala as a case where it came up but it certainly was not a central concern or roadblock to what people were trying to do.

Q: So human rights was not a big player?

BLAKEMORE: Certainly not at that point, no.

Q: How about in congress or groups in the United States, did you feel problems in that?

BLAKEMORE: No not a serious level.

Q: How did Admiral Howe relate to the desks of the geographic bureaus? Did you have any feel for that?

BLAKEMORE: He had a very tight relationship with the Israeli desk I can recall. But his personal interests and concerns, I was very thankful to note, had to do with strategic issues. Strategic weapons reduction talks that were going on or he thought might be going on were his central concern so I didn't get a lot of direct involvement with him which was fine with me.

Q: Did you feel any repercussions from the arms control disarmament agency? They were working to rid the world of arms while you were selling arms.

BLAKEMORE: It's true. They were putting forth plans consistent with the kind of idealism I talked about at the beginning of our discussion of this particular position but they weren't having any impact on anything.

I have to tell one story about my experience in this bureau. There is a provision in the law which in an emergency allows the U.S. government to divert weapons and equipment from active duty U.S. forces and get them to the foreign country with the idea that some financing in the form of military assistance, or whatever, would be used to replace those items of equipment or weaponry in the U.S. inventory.

Chad was having some trouble you may recall during that Reagan administration, the first one, with Libya. It was a true emergency in the sense that they needed help quickly at one point. The law calls for the Congress to be notified of the intent to divert equipment from U.S. forces and there is a waiting period of how many days, I can't remember. If there is no effective objection from the Congress, the stuff is shipped. We were using this mechanism to ship some stuff to Chad in a hurry.

I can remember one Friday night one of my officers who handled Africa was having a heated conversation with someone on the NSC staff or the White House staff and put me on the phone. It was a lieutenant colonel by the name of Oliver North on the phone that I had never spoken to although I knew who he was. He asked what the delay was in getting the equipment out to Chad? He wanted to see it move immediately. I said, "well Colonel North that is fine. We have notified the Congress and we have to wait so many days and then we will get it moving. We understand the urgency." North's reply was "fuck the Congress. Send the stuff now." Which we did. I like the story because it provides an early insight about Lieutenant Colonel North they are all so learned about in the Iran-Contra affair.

Q: This is during the time of the Afghan War. Did this come into your purview or was this elsewhere?

BLAKEMORE: It was elsewhere because we only dealt with governments. Of course some of the stuff we were sending to Pakistan was relevant in that context but that would be the only way.

Q: Were there any other countries that you can think of that seem to be getting disproportionate amounts of equipment?

BLAKEMORE: Zaire. Mobutu was still the darling of the CIA at that point. The last bastion of something, I don't know what.

Q: What was the feeling about Zaire? He had, at least it proved to be and I think everybody agreed at the time, an absolutely ineffective military force. There was huge corruption. What were you doing?

BLAKEMORE: We were giving him money to make sure that he still felt positively towards the United States and Angola was very much in ferment at the time and we were supporting Mr. Savimbi who was as I recall, based in part in Zaire. There was no good reason I don't think.

Q: Was the feeling that with Zaire you were basically giving money but was there supposed to be equipment?

BLAKEMORE: No, you can't give money without the equipment following.

Q: What kind of equipment would be going there?

BLAKEMORE: I think pretty basic stuff, most of it. Lower levels of technology in terms of aircraft. I can't remember if we even sold them any aircraft. Going back to the division between the financing side and the weapons approval side of my office it was the financing side that was involved in Zaire.

Q: Did you have anything to do with the famous duo, the Greece Turkey relationship? They are both members of NATO but I was wondering how that impacted on your office?

BLAKEMORE: Security assistance levels don't vary much from year-to-year. There tends to be a pattern and every year there is some tinkering and some effort to make a fairly small shift from one country to another but it is hard to do. I don't recall any significant efforts to change either the Greek or the Turkish levels in my time but what I did learn was how much the Pentagon was in the camp of Turkey in that dispute. I think that explains why in part the Turkish share of assistance was so much higher. I am trying to remember whether there were any controversial weapons sales to either of those countries. Probably aircraft but I don't remember. It was too long ago.

Q: Do you recall any instance of sort of saying, oh, hell, let so and so have this toy of some system that was probably essentially too fancy or inappropriate but it would look good for military parades in the country, or something of that nature.

BLAKEMORE: There were a couple of systems that took on the aura of being a badge of having made it in the military world. The F-16s were certainly primary among them. The L model of the AIM-9 air-to-air missile was another one. The M-60 tank was another one. But in terms of particular countries, I mentioned before some of the recipients of the F-16 that I didn't think I understood why they had them: Thailand would be one, Indonesia, I think Singapore. After you sold to a couple of those countries it began to be clear why the others needed it, because of the ones you sold to begin with.

Q: Was there any concern that you would hear from lower level military people saying that we are arming these people and then we are going to have to fight our equipment? Or were we careful to make sure that whatever they got wasn't going to be good enough to fight ours? Was that a deliberate policy?

BLAKEMORE: We didn't sell top-line equipment to many countries outside NATO except Israel. There is no way to avoid risking your own forces when you make these sales. If you are selling the Stinger missile, the now famous surface-to-air missile, once somebody has got those in his hands, it is potentially dangerous to anybody who happens to be operating aircraft in that vicinity. I don't think I heard much of that kind of reflective conversation from the Pentagon people.

Q: I was trying to think of what was happening around the world at this particular time. Did you feel very much in competition with particularly the French? Was this one of these things where if we don't sell it to them they will buy the Stare fighter plane from the French? Was this in our thinking at the time?

BLAKEMORE: Occasionally yes. I am trying to think. The fighter aircraft was one area. It was the Mirage 4 or 3 I think. I don't recall a significant problem. It did come up occasionally and it was of course leverage that customer governments would use.

Q: What was the feeling about Soviet equipment?

BLAKEMORE: The Pentagon at the time had a lot of contempt for the quality of the Soviet equipment, with a few exceptions. One of the major exceptions being artillery. They had a lot of respect for the quality of Soviet artillery. There was a lot of puzzlement as to why we were never able to build really competing quality. In general I think there was a lot of confidence, certainly in the superiority of U.S. aircraft.

Q: Did naval equipment come up much?

BLAKEMORE: It did. Not ships very often but certainly naval missiles. There was a sophisticated ship-to-ship missile, the Harpoon, that was one that people were interested in. I don't think anybody other than the Koreans and the Israelis in my time got that.

Q: Was there concern over some of the equipment because there was a French missile, the Exocet, which was used with great effectiveness during the Falklands War against the British? Did you find Americans kind of wondering, what are we doing? Was this in the back of peoples calculations?

BLAKEMORE: Do you mean whether the Exocet was a superior weapons system?

Q: Not so much, but particularly with these missile systems, concerns that someday we may have to deal with this ourselves.

BLAKEMORE: Absolutely. As I was saying about the surface-to-air missiles, and I know that there was contention in the Air Force now that I think about it about selling more advanced systems, versions of the AIM-9 air missile. Pilots were very eager to be certain that any conceivable enemy would not have a sophisticated version of that because it is a very good weapon. I can remember some discussions about sales of the M model of that missile that were very controversial. I can't remember what the countries were. Even the Israelis may have been controversial on that one. I think they were.

Q: You left this job in 1985. Whither?

BLAKEMORE: I went to a wonderful year in the senior seminar.

Q: That would be '85 to '86.

BLAKEMORE: That's right. It was a sabbatical year. I felt honored to be chosen to do that. I was very impressed with the quality of the people from the State Department as well as those from six or eight other U.S. government agencies who were in that class of 30 or so. The curriculum was wonderful. The quality of speakers was a whole range of fascinating people. I can remember one that I really liked was Judge Green who was in his seventh or eighth year at the time of sitting in judgment on the breakup of AT&T. It was sort of his life's work. He couldn't get unstuck from it. A fascinating man. There were lots of speakers of that quality, but he particularly sticks out in my mind. We traveled around the United States. I think that the seminar really achieved its purpose of getting Foreign Service officers to focus for a year on key U.S. domestic issues. It was highly successful in that. There was a lot of emphasis on the economy. We even dabbled in some social issues. It was very well done.

Q: In '86 whither?

BLAKEMORE: What I've just said about the senior seminar was the good news. The bad news about the senior seminar was that because it was this great honor, it was supposed to mean that someone in personnel thought you had a good future ahead of you in the Foreign Service. They didn't find me a job when I left.

Q: The same thing happened to me back in '75.

BLAKEMORE: Some things never change. So I had to find myself a job. My old friends in the East Asia bureau helped me out and I became the director of the office of Korean affairs in 1986.

Q: So you were in Korean affairs from '86 to when?

BLAKEMORE: One year.

Q: '87. What was the situation as you saw it in Korea in that particular period?

BLAKEMORE: In retrospect it was a very humbling year. Chun Doo Hwan had taken over the presidency as discussed early in this narrative in 1979-80 and was still in power and very much in control of the situation. I think that the transition to his pal General Roh Tae Woo took place just before or sometime during the time that I was there that year.

It is a humbling thing, I say, because I was discouraged about the political future of Korea. I had always believed that economic progress of which they had had a great deal, would eventually force political liberalization. That they would figure out some orderly way to do that that would not leave them open to military adventurism by the North Koreans. In my year there I became more and more discouraged about the likelihood of that. It just didn't seem like they were going to figure out how to do that. The military government was as difficult as ever.

A fairly short period of time after I left everything loosened. Essentially the democratic government that you see in Korea now came about. So much for the State Department's ability to see long-term trends coming even of such a cataclysmic nature as that. I don't think anybody in the United States government in 1986 had a clue.

Q: I think this is quite true even in mega terms with the Soviet Union. It was close to the same period. But of course on the other hand probably nobody in Korea saw it either.

BLAKEMORE: I think that is right.

Q: Some of these things happen and it tends to make intelligence analysts go from worst case scenarios and predict all sorts of things which have no real validity for policy makers but it is just to make them look good because things do change.

BLAKEMORE: Things change. I was not intending to critique our ability to predict and to foresee events so much as anybody's ability to. Human affairs of this sort are just very murky. It was great news when it happened.

Q: When you are dealing with Koreans does this mean North Korea too? BLAKEMORE: Yes, that's right.

Q: What were we seeing in North Korea? Here was the center of where we were dealing with North Korea and what do we know about it?

BLAKEMORE: Not much. No more than we did the last time we talked about it. North Korea was often described as the most difficult intelligence target in the world. Human intelligence was nonexistent. What we knew was only what was photographable from a satellite.

But I enjoyed that aspect of my year as the head of the desk because I had a very irreverent and very bright young officer by the name of Joe Mussomeli, who was the North Korea desk officer. Under his relentless prodding, we put forward a pretty strong case for the desirability of an improved relationship between the United States and North Korea bringing the South Koreans along if we could but doing it anyway even if we couldn't. I can't say that we accomplished anything overall during that year, but we make it possible to talk about that issue.

All along as far as I could see we had been perfectly happy to let the South Koreans call the shots in our relationship with North Korea. We discussed earlier the aberration that Jimmy Carter kind of forced in 1979. I do think we made it possible to talk about North Korea as a separate issue from the South. There has been subsequently a little bit of loosening in that relationship, not a lot but some, and a little bit of willingness on the part of the United States to deal directly with North Korea.

Q: Were nuclear problems apparent at that point?

BLAKEMORE: No, I don't think so. That came later. I think if the nuclear problems had been apparent we wouldn't have been able even to have the discussions that we did. What we were trying to do was some very modest stuff like approve visas for North Korean delegates to various kinds of sports conferences and so on that were being hosted by the United States and that we had routinely kept the North Koreans away from. It was modest stuff. Academic exchanges and that sort of thing.

Q: In this relationship with North Korea, from your perspective was China playing any role?

BLAKEMORE: No. We tried to keep the Chinese government very much informed of our thinking. They wanted us to believe that they played a moderating role on North Korean behavior and who knows maybe they did. But I am sure the Chinese would have said so either way. They played a role in the sense that we acknowledged that they were a major factor in this equation.

Q: Were the North Koreans making any attempt to become more palatable to the international body politics?

BLAKEMORE: No. I think it had been a long time since any of their embassies had been caught financing their operations by drug sales which was a major case in the '70s when I was on the desk the first time. I think it was in Copenhagen.

Q: Yes, it was Copenhagen, I'm quite sure.

BLAKEMORE: So that kind of gross anti-social behavior was no longer visible.

Q: They weren't blowing any South Korean cabinet ministers up guess?

BLAKEMORE: Not since the early '80s in Rangoon. No they weren't doing any of that but it was pretty grim. There was no relationship.

Q: How about with the South Koreans? How did you find the South Korean embassy? How well were they sort of plugged into the Washington scene?

BLAKEMORE: Reasonably well. They were good men and I think they represented Korea quite well. Economics becoming more and more of an aspect of what they were here to represent with each passing year became large in the relationship. Unlike my earlier tenure on the desk when everyone's time and attention were dominated by the Koreagate scandal and the troop withdrawal issue, it was a much more normal time my second tour.

Q: Was there any analysis at that time coming from either political or economic sides about Korea incorporating the problems of too cozy a relationship between the government and the big corporations? The repercussion which just hit Korea within the last few months.

BLAKEMORE: I don't think you could call what was going on, I don't think you could dignify it with the word analysis. I would say whining from the Commerce Department and the Treasury Department. I put it that way because people did not analyze the situation as far as I am aware of. There was no really effective information base, factual base. There was just a sense that the Koreans had followed the Japanese model of intimacy between the government and the big companies that was detrimental to U.S. trade interests.

I don't think, I am certain that no one thought of it in terms of corruption the way it seems so obvious just in the last few months. As you said, corruption is at the heart of this both in Japan and in Korea. It seems to me the U.S. government for a long time stood in awe of the coordinating capabilities of the Ministry of International Trade and Industry in Japan and just thought that it was something about the Japanese culture which made it possible for them to work together so smoothly with the major industrial giants. People didn't talk about corruption and I think blindly that analysis was shifted in the minds of U.S. policy makers from Japan to Korea without even thinking about how Korean culture might make it a little different. Yes people were complaining about it but we had a major trade surplus with Korea at the time as I recall. It was based a lot on exports from the United States, aircraft, that sort of thing.

Q: After about a year there in '87 you left and did what?

BLAKEMORE: My deputy in the political-military bureau was a woman by the name of Jennifer Ward, who at the time that I was back on the Korea desk was the DCM in Senegal. I got a call from her one day from Senegal saying, "Ambassador Lyman in Lagos is looking for a DCM and I told him you would do a great job so why don't you make some noise from your end to see about that." This came as quite a shock to me. She and Ambassador Lyman worked together in several different places and had a good relationship. I didn't know what I was going to do next but going to Africa hadn't been one of the things that I thought about.

I was very attracted by the possibility of becoming a DCM. I had a couple of phone calls from Princeton Lyman which went well. Before long he offered me the job. The East Asia bureau did not make any effort to stand in my way. They could see that the DCM position in a large embassy was a good thing for me. It became much more of a problem as a personal decision because my wife at the time was a psychotherapist in private practice who had been following me around the world a lot. Now we had been home long enough that her practice was booming and she didn't want to go. So I trekked off to Nigeria by myself living in a great large colonial house full of servants and me.

Q: So you were in Nigeria from when to when?

BLAKEMORE: From '87 to '89. I was supposed to be there three years but after two years I curtailed for personal reasons. A fascinating experience. I had never set foot anywhere in Africa before I went to Lagos. That's a dynamic culture and a fascinating part of the world.

Q: I assume you were sort of reading up on Nigeria and talking to people on the desk. What were you getting from this? What were you expecting when you got to Nigeria?

BLAKEMORE: I don't know if I can give you a good answer to that or not. I did reading of two kinds. I read some history and a lot of State Department traffic from the previous few years but also some fiction, some West African fiction to get some kind of sense of the place. Nigeria in general, and Lagos in particular, has a reputation of being a wild place full of flamboyant deal maker people, socially assertive, not a very well organized place. All of that was part of the lore that was conveyed to me before I went and it certainly was true.

One of the things that seems immediately obvious upon living in Nigeria for a month or more, as you look around at not only Nigeria but the neighboring countries in West Africa, is that the European colonial powers have a lot to answer for. It is axiomatic that colonialism was arrogant and wrong. Not to put too fine a point on it, if you are going to have colonialism, the nature of the colonial boundaries that were drawn are really offensive today when countries are trying to make some kind of political sense out of themselves.

You look at a country like Nigeria, I don't know how many languages are spoken there, 50 or 60 I would imagine. There are three major tribes with one clearly Christian, one clearly Muslim and one divided. They have little use for each other. There is little or no historic reason for close interaction with each other and here they are jammed together in one country. At least two of the three major tribes straddle Nigeria's boundaries, that is they are bigger than Nigeria. You can go well into Benin and find Yoruba speakers and into Niger to find Hausa speakers.

I think that this colonial history gives the area a certain chaotic feel. I often thought and sometimes said privately during my time in Nigeria that I wouldn't want to predict whether it was going to disintegrate eventually along tribal or religious lines because the two tensions were sort of overlaid and very much in evidence all the time in the press and in the politics of the country to the extent that the military government was allowing politics. I found it quite a sad situation and at least Nigeria is large enough to be economically viable if they can figure out some way to deal with each other. Even though much of the oil wealth has been squandered, it keeps coming in again every year so they have some financial base to operate from.

Q: What was the government like when you were there?

BLAKEMORE: It was a reasonably benevolent military dictatorship. One of the ironies of Nigeria is that any Nigerian you talk to in public life will assure you that the natural state of the Nigerian polity is a democracy led by civilians. By the time that I was there in '87 they had more years logged since independence in 1960 under the military than they had under a civilian government. Of course all the years since between 1987 and now are military. Their self image does not fit the reality.

Ibrahim Babangida was head of the government. He was a general from a small tribe, not one of the three big ones, and a Muslim but not a militant one. In that sort of demographic sense, he was a good choice. A sophisticated soft spoken sort of man. Corrupt but not excessively so in the West African context and not any more repressive of dissenting views than was absolutely necessary. That is my impression. I don't think we had any evidence of mistreatment of prisoners. There was some imprisonment without trial but not much. It is always a little weird to talk about relative human rights, human rights are or they aren't. But certainly in comparison with the Abacha government which followed, the Babangida government looks very enlightened for a military dictatorship.

Q: How did Princeton Lyman operate?

BLAKEMORE: With charm and grace. He is a delightful man to work for. He is an economist by trade, a Ph.D. in economics. An AID officer originally and therefore much more at home in the world of development economics than your average American career ambassador. He is also very much at home in the political world. An extremely effective contact person with the Nigerian government. He had very, very good access to all sorts of people including the president on a fairly regular basis.

Because of his personality, the morale in the embassy was very good for a West African embassy where there were very real problems and hardships. The weather and crime were major hardships. Crazy, wild traffic and transportation uncertainties. You could never be sure that you are going to be able to get out if you needed to get out for a family emergency at home for example, because the airlines are all overbooked. Health problems were quite significant. No one would voluntarily be admitted to a Nigerian hospital, a westerner, because the sanitary conditions were outrageously bad. Given all of that kind of impetus towards poor morale, it was impressive to me how good the embassy morale was under Lyman's leadership.

Q: What about dealing with the Nigerian government? Did you have access up and down the line?

BLAKEMORE: Yes, it varied a great deal from ministry to ministry. We had good access in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of course and good access in the Ministry of Petroleum. In the Ministry of Finance we had fair access. The other ones tended to be fairly closed. I could get to the minister as DCM, but other people in the embassy might have trouble having substantive contact.

Socially I would like to say something about my Nigerian experience because I found Nigerians extremely friendly at a superficial level, welcoming, friendly. But very, very difficult to develop any more meaningful social relationship with than that. Perhaps it is because of the size of the country and its importance in its region that people didn't have a lot of time or interest in foreigners socially unless there was some specific, usually financial, gain to be made. This made it a more lonely tour than some others I had had.

Q: Particularly being without your wife. Often the wife is the person who can bring in the interesting people.

BLAKEMORE: That's true. I was without that asset as well.

Q: Were there any problems with the neighbors around Nigeria, either Nigeria intruding into their space or some of them intruding into Nigerian space?

BLAKEMORE: Nothing significant during the time that I was there. There was a little bit of tension, I guess, on the Nigerian Cameroon border partly because it lies in deep jungle and no one is sure exactly where it is. Nothing significant.

Q: During this period we had this new relationship with the still Soviet Union, a much closer relationship. Did that have any effect on Nigeria?

BLAKEMORE: It did certainly on the social level between the two embassies. There was a great deal more social interaction. I remember having the Soviet number two to lunch and that sort of thing. We all tried to figure out how to do this. What kind of language we'd use and how much we might say to each other about Nigeria and so on. It was an interesting little experience and it got the ball rolling in that part of the world. Let me say something about the experience of being a DCM. I know a lot of former colleagues in the Department who have said that they found DCM a terribly difficult job and unrewarding. That was not my experience at all. I enjoyed it very much. I enjoyed the managerial challenge, the ability to help set the tone for the embassy in general and the ability to promote harmonious inter-agency relationships. Of course all of that is made easier by a competent and charming ambassador. It would be much different under somebody else. Under those conditions I found it a terrific job.

Q: What about the British? Did they have any residual influence there?

BLAKEMORE: They had a larger embassy than you might expect, larger than any other Europeans. But no, I don't think they did.

Q: Did the outside world intrude at all on what you were doing there, developments anywhere?

BLAKEMORE: Yes but in a limited way. Chet Crocker, the Assistant Secretary for African affairs was trying valiantly to broker some kind of a cease fire in the endless Angolan civil war and he dropped in to Nigeria several times during the course of that effort trying to get the Nigerians to be supportive and to make sure they understood what he was trying to do. So we carried messages to the Nigerian government fairly often on that subject and on any number of African subjects on the good assumption that as the most populous country in the continent what they thought was worth influencing.

Q: Did we also see, or did the Nigerians see themselves as the preeminent policemen of the African world as far as willingness to dispense their troops to try to act in an international way or not?

BLAKEMORE: That came later. Their involvement in Liberia for example came after my time. I think they probably would have thought of themselves that way with a certain swagger but it wasn't happening then. Babangida was a cautious man. He didn't have any ambitions beyond Nigeria.

Q: Was there any problem with the Nigerians going to the United States? I think of a discussion that I had recently with a high school classmate of mine who is a banker in Baltimore. He says as soon as a Nigerian entered a bank anywhere you would lock up the vaults and shut up everything because they were so much better at extracting money illegally from banks through checks, scams, credit cards. Was this a problem for you?

BLAKEMORE: Yes. The most immediate problem was heroin smuggling though. There was a well established route for Pakistani heroin mostly, Afghan probably too, to come into Lagos and be broken down into smaller packages that could be transported in body cavities particularly. The Nigerian mules would take it to the United States. It was a major source of heroin on the streets of the U.S. There was a two officer DEA office in the embassy. That was a very contentious aspect of the relationship.

As you suggest financial crime was another problem. I can remember seeing a xeroxed copy of an instruction booklet, you might call it, for how to run a credit card scam. It had been circulated among the Nigerian community in the United States in various cities. So yes, unfortunately that was a highly visible aspect of the relationship.

Q: Did we have any consulates in Nigeria at the time?

BLAKEMORE: Yes we had a consulate in Kaduna which is in the Hausa Muslim north. It has been there for some time. It is a small consulate, probably four or five officers. All of them junior except the consul general. Not really a significant listening post.

Q: I was wondering did you find at all within the embassy a breakdown in interests? During the Biafran War we effectively had a civil war within our own mission between our consulate in Ibo country and the embassy. In fact it was one of the more significant clashes that is sort of unrecorded except in our oral history program. I was wondering if you had run across extreme localitis or anything like that?

BLAKEMORE: No. There was no consulate in Enugu anymore. That would have been more contentious than the one in Kaduna. Periodically every year the cost cutting effort would look at Kaduna and say do we really need this place and the embassy would dutifully muster an argument that it was essential though I'm not sure that I believe that. I don't think you found Americans taking sides in Nigerian politics. There wasn't much Nigerian politics going on at the time.

Q: In '89 you left.

BLAKEMORE: I left and I left in a hurry because as I say I came back for personal reasons so I did not have a lot of choices among jobs. I think if I had stayed there another year I probably would have had a good shot at a small ambassadorship somewhere in Africa. Maybe not. Maybe that's a pipe dream. Anyway I did not do that and I was running out of time as an OC level officer. One of the reasons why it was okay to come home was that I had one more year and I would just take a job and do something in Washington for that year and then I would be out and have to go find something else. So I came back to the Board of Examiners where I spent a year. Just after I got back I got promoted much to my surprise, so I had another seven years and that was no longer a concern. Not a whole lot to be said about a year on the Board of Examiners as an examiner.

Q: What was your impression of the people who came through?

BLAKEMORE: For the sake of organization, why don't we save that kind of discussion until my second appearance on the Board of Examiners when I was in charge of the operations?

Q: Okay, fine. We're talking about '89 to '90 on the BEX. Thewhere?

BLAKEMORE: Then I spent my two best years in the Foreign Service as an inspector.

Q: You were in inspection from '90 to?

BLAKEMORE: I had just gotten separated on a way to a divorce so I did not have the tug that so many inspectors have spending weeks on the road.

Q: You had separated from the home front?

BLAKEMORE: That was not an issue. My children were grown and gone. It was a fabulous two years. I thoroughly enjoyed it. I don't know what else to say about it in terms of this project.

Q: Could you maybe give a feel, because it has changed over the years, of the role of the inspection during this '90 to '92 period.

BLAKEMORE: I was a deputy team leader. The first year all of my inspections were in the ARA bureau, the Latin American bureau, in small countries and large. Everything from Belize to Brazil with some contentious ones in between particularly the Bahamas and Peru both for narcotics-related reasons. The role of the inspection corps was at a high I think at the time that I was there. We delved into absolutely everything going on in an embassy. No areas were off limits. We even looked to some extent at intelligence operations which surprised me when I first got there. We wrote very straightforward performance evaluations on both the ambassador and DCM. We had an inspector general, Sherman Funk, who had some political courage so that if we had a controversial recommendation that we could convince him was legitimate, he would stand behind it and it would at least see the light of day. Of course you wouldn't want to evaluate the inspection function on the number of its recommendations that were immediately adopted. If you did you'd stop having inspections. I thought it was a very legitimate kind of operation during those two years. We were not sweeping things under the rug. We were not second guessed by the Washington element of the inspection office. It was a good experience from that point of view.

Q: When you went to some of these posts, you started in ARA was it?

BLAKEMORE: The whole first year I was ARA.

Q: How did you find the outlook of the people you were dealing with? Was there an ARA mind set? This has always been a perpetual concern, whether it is justified or not I don't know, because of that you get too much in bed with the powers that be. Did you find any of that?

BLAKEMORE: No and I had kind of expected to. I expected kind of an insularity in that bureau compared with others that I had served in. I had never set foot in Latin America. The embassies were much more, I don't know if cosmopolitan is the right word, but not insular. They didn't seem to be isolated to me at all. The one in Belize was isolated but what can you do. No. I kind of expected that and I didn't see it. It seemed a little more evident in Washington in the pre-inspection briefing and so on, perhaps than it did when we got to the field. It was not a major issue. It was very clear to me, for example, ten years earlier when I was in the political-military bureau in my previous experience with the service on a world-wide basis.

Q: One of the major issues at this time was narcotics?

BLAKEMORE: Absolutely. As a deputy team leader in smaller countries I typically did the political part of the inspection and narcotics as well. It was really an eye opener for me to go to Peru particularly where at the time the U.S. had a major operation going on. I think there was 50 to 60 million dollars a year into narcotics assistance. We had a base up in the cocoa producing area where the team leader and I spent three days. We got stuck there because of helicopter problems.

The eye opener was that what seemed so obvious to me after looking around and talking to people on the site was that this problem will never be dealt with on the supply side. The only way to deal with it is on the demand side because if you are going to have an open economy and a free country, you can't possibly keep products of such high value and low volume out when there is a demand for it. This was the most controversial set of recommendations that I got involved in my two years. We really had some fundamental questions about whether this major effort in Peru made any sense at all.

Q: Was there any equivalent of penetration? Was the drug culture getting to our embassy posts and others as far as money particularly?

BLAKEMORE: No reason to think so. Terrorism was getting to the embassy in Peru while we were there. There were two bombings of U.S. facilities during the three weeks that we were inspecting the embassy in Peru.

Q: Who was bombing?

BLAKEMORE: The urban guerrillas. Not the Shining Path but the urban guerrillas.

Q: From what you could sample, was there a change in, or a feeling of change, about the relationship with the United States to these countries?

BLAKEMORE: I think that was clearest in Chile which was beginning to organize itself for a major exporting role with the United States. There was a lot of excitement and hope about some kind of free trade arrangement with Chile. Yes, there was a lot of conversation and an atmosphere of change both in the country and with regards to the United States. Certainly not in Peru. The other countries that I got involved in that first year were Brazil, Jamaica, Belize and the Bahamas.

Q: What were you picking up from particularly the junior officers as you went around about? Supposedly there are changes in the outlook of people coming into the Foreign Service today. Were you getting anything from them?

BLAKEMORE: I began to see some of it but not nearly to the extent that I did later in the Board of Examiners. I guess if I think about it people did seem, during my inspection time, less committed to a life-long career with the Foreign Service than my generation had been. There was also some feeling among the younger officers that the Foreign Service wasn't as important as it used to be. Then it was probably true. We were talking about several embassies where the State Department presence was perhaps even a minority of the total staff. A lot of that State Department presence was engaged in the housekeeping role, not exactly glamorous. People were aware of that, probably younger people more than older people.

Q: Were you getting at all involved in some of the social issues: sexual harassment, drinking, incompatibilities? Could you talk about whatever you feel you can talk about but to get some idea of what the problems were?

BLAKEMORE: We got involved in all of those things. Interest in issues of sexual harassment varied depending upon the attitudes of the team leader and I don't want to get into that. Some are more alert to that problem than others. But yes drinking and abuse of junior officers.

Q: Yes, I know. Overusing them.

BLAKEMORE: Overusing them, misusing them, not giving them any kind of a broad opportunity to experience the Foreign Service especially in the first tour which I think is extremely important which was, and I assume is, department policy. Yes, I think we were able to make an impact in those areas. We were instrumental in the removal of a DCM in that first year who was really kind of out of touch with what was going on in the embassy. Probably the inspections that I participated in had more impact in that kind of personnel administrative structural way than we did in a policy way where it is much harder to make a point.

Q: Were you seeing a problem with the growing, in what you experienced in going to Nigeria, and that is the husband and wife each having their own career and even enjoined couples and many weren't? Was this becoming a major personnel problem and how do you deal with this situation?

BLAKEMORE: I don't see it as a problem. I see it really as a solution particularly the tandem couple arrangement where both people are State officers.

Q: That implies that you have to sort of pair them off.

BLAKEMORE: It is a problem in the personnel assignment process in a couple of ways. They tend to have to be in larger embassies to make sure that they don't report to each other in the hierarchy. If you are an officer traveling alone so to speak and you don't get a job not because you weren't qualified but because there was a job for that tandem spouse in the place you wanted to go, you don't feel too happy about that. I think in terms of a diminishing number of people who are willing to be the trailing spouse to a Foreign Service officer, if we don't welcome tandem couples we are going to be in trouble.

Q: We have a problem in that you can't mtake husbands and wives into the Foreign Service, which is implicit when you are talking about tandem couples. The normal couple will not necessarily be both employees of the State Department. Were you seeing any impact on the Foreign Service as far as breakup of marriages, people shortening tours, this type of thing.

BLAKEMORE: I don't have any doubt that those are both common effects of the societal change really but I can't say that I observed this in the course of inspections in a way that I could put any more meat on that generalization.

Q: The second year where were you working mainly?

BLAKEMORE: The second year was even more exciting. We spent nine weeks in Germany. I had never served in Germany or Europe and it was a wonderful experience for me from that point of view. I spent six weeks in South Central Africa, Zambia, Zimbabwe and Malawi, and then eight weeks in Japan. We considered ourselves to be the A-team having inspected both Germany and Japan in the same year.

Q: What did you find in Germany? We still have a considerable establishment in Germany yet there has been an analysis that Germany has not played much of a role in what we are doing these days. They followed our guide until they got united and now they are so busy uniting that they are not that key of a player in a way. I don't know if this is true or not.

BLAKEMORE: I don't know either but remember we are talking about seven years ago when that whole change was still quite new. Germany was united and they were certainly devoting a lot of time and energy to figuring out how to make that work. But they were very interested in the military relationship still at that point. It wasn't so clear then as it is now that military tensions would be greatly reduced.

Q: How did you feel about our presence in Germany?

BLAKEMORE: It seemed too large and it seemed like an over involvement. Part of that is the inevitable lag between changes in the policy climate and changes in the staffing levels. Everyone has been used to, for a long time, giving the European bureau whatever it said it wanted in terms of personnel. I suspect it has changed a little bit by now but it certainly had not changed in 1991.

Q: Sort of compare and contrast Germany and Japan from your observation.

BLAKEMORE: It seemed to me that the climate for U.S. policy in terms of U.S. interest was a lot more lively in Japan than it was in Bonn. Trade issues are always very exciting. The stakes can be so high and you don't have the restraint imposed on security issues by the presence of a common threatening enemy. For that reason alone I think that the Japan U.S. relationship is still evolving in ways that probably the U.S. Germany relationship was not at that time. Trying to figure out how we wanted to relate to each other and what the security component of that relationship ought to be.

Q: Did you find that the trade relationship dominated everything else?

BLAKEMORE: Yes, absolutely. The country team action officer on economic issues was the ambassador without any question even though he was not an economic person. It was Mike Armacost. It didn't matter. He had to do it and he knew it. He embraced that. The whole embassy was interested in economic trade issues.

Q: What was the impression that you were getting about, it was known as Japan Incorporated, the interlocking between the big firms and the Japanese government at that time?

BLAKEMORE: A lot of resentment about the supposed unfair advantage it gave the Japanese firms although that advantage seems to have faded in the seven years since. One of the things that interested me most about inspecting Japan was the fact that I had spent six years living next door in Korea without ever logging much time in Japan. I had a lot of fun in the initial meeting with the American staff by saying that I spent six years in Korea and I felt that with the help of the Koreans that I knew everything about Japanese society and the people that I needed to know.

During my years in Korea it looked as if the U.S. embassy in Tokyo was unfailingly an apologist for the Japanese government. Making excuses for it. Doing a lot of "no wait a minute, you just don't understand Japanese culture and what this really means is this." I think that was an attitude that we were always contemptuous of in the embassy in Seoul. You didn't need to be that way with the Koreans. There was a lot less of that when I actually did spend eight weeks in Japan. Times had changed and of course I was closer. There was a lot less defensiveness about the way the Japanese do things and a lot more willingness to go along without complaint with major Washington initiatives to pry open this sector or take a look at that sector of the Japanese economy which seemed so closed.

Q: Did you find any great problems there?

BLAKEMORE: In the embassy?

Q: In the embassy or in the rest of Japan?

BLAKEMORE: No. In fact I was quite impressed with the way the economic functions had been integrated under the economic minister. Much more effectively than they seemed to have been done in Bonn. Again we are talking about at that particular time. Each of the agencies still insisted upon its own particular form of independence, especially the Treasury attaché. But still the coordination was very good.

Q: When you came back in '92 did you move on?

BLAKEMORE: Yes. I had one more assignment which was as the staff director at the Board of Examiners.

Q: From when to when?

BLAKEMORE: '92 to '94. The thing that I liked about that assignment was that it put me knee deep in some new areas of human endeavor and I thought about how things ought to be done that I had never been involved in before.

One of the tasks of the position, for example, was oversight of a contract with the Educational Testing Service at Princeton which was the preparer of the written Foreign Service exams. I learned a lot about testing theory and practice with those people who were endlessly patient. It gave me time to go up to Princeton and talk to lots of different people about why they did things the way they did. A fascinating area and it was something that I had never been involved in before.

Incidentally I was very impressed with how seriously the Educational Testing Service was taking the idea that written exams needed to be as race and gender neutral as possible. They have all kinds of safeguards both in the writing of questions from that end and also in the analysis of answers so that for example if women got question number 82 wrong twice as frequently as men, question 82 was disqualified. It didn't matter what it was about or if anybody could look at it and say "here's the problem." It didn't matter. I think that is relevant to the major task of my time there which was trying to improve the diversity of the Foreign Service. I'll say some more about that in a second but the other area that I spent even more time on was the refinement and improvement of the way the oral assessment day for the Foreign Service goes. I spent a lot of time with some very good industrial psychologists who were under contract with the Department to help improve this process. I feel that during my time there really was improvement in making an essentially subjective process as objective as possible.

There was a lot of pressure at the time for improving the diversity of the Foreign Service or as President Clinton said "making it look more like America."

Q: Could you explain what diversity means because somebody may read this in 100 years and not understand what the word means?

BLAKEMORE: It meant more women in the Foreign Service initially. By the time I was there what it really meant was more African Americans, more Hispanics and more Asians, and Native Americans too. The State Department had over the years tried various tinkering with the process. Letting selected representatives of minority groups bypass the whole process at one point. That was a dismal failure, that experiment.

Q: How did it fail?

BLAKEMORE: Those people who were brought in around the system flunked out in droves. Some might argue that they flunked out in droves because the Foreign Service wasn't ready for people of color. Others would argue that no one ever found out whether they had the characteristics necessary to be successful in the Foreign Service before they were brought in. It was a terribly unfair thing to do to them. I kind of lean toward the latter.

We dabbled with various things. At the time I was there from '92 to '94 affirmative action was beginning to have this dark cloud hang over it which is now quite visible. The cloud was starting to be visible then so overt affirmative action was a problem.

Q: Why, as at the time?

BLAKEMORE: The legal climate was changing. It was not at all clear that it was legal, or would be ruled legal by the courts. Nonetheless there was tremendous amount of pressure for improving diversity. Women were never really a problem during my time. More and more women were taking the written exam. Not half of the candidates but a lot of the candidates. They were passing both the written exam and the oral exam at good rates. They were comparable to men on the written and better than men on the oral. Although there was still noise about it, if someone bothered to look at the numbers that problem kind of faded.

The racial composition problem did not fade and it began to relate with the number of people who sat down to take the written exam. My argument always was that let's say you wanted ten percent of your new people to be minorities or 20 percent. Given the number of minorities who chose voluntarily to take the written exam you never had a chance in hell of 20 percent of them getting through at the other end. The numbers made it impossible. Of course policy makers don't want to hear that. They don't want to hear what is wrong. It was a constant struggle. The pass rates of African Americans on the written exam were not good. The pass rates on the oral exam were better but still not good and so of course the number of people available to be brought in was unsatisfactory.

We never did really make any progress on the problem. I believe that there are only two ways to solve that problem. Solve it by getting proportional representation of minorities in the Foreign Service. Either abandon the written exam and do it some other way where you can be subjective and get away with it by doing it with a series of interviews for example. The other way would be to raise the academic standards of achievements of minorities who go through the process. It is not that they can't do it, it is just that they are not in the position to do it.

Q: I would have thought that the one group that probably could outperform the normal taker would be the Asians.

BLAKEMORE: They don't take the exam in very large numbers I think. I always pay attention to the Koreans and you can't be absolutely certain by looking at names whether you are looking at a Korean but you get a pretty good idea. I think that essentially Korean parents are going to be a lot prouder of their son either if he makes a million dollars or is a doctor or a Ph.D. than if he is a Foreign Service officer. I don't think that there is any particular cultural value to that. They don't take the written exam but they do fine when they do.

On the oral exam, where there is more potential for subjectivity, I never talked with my examiners about improving the number of women that we passed or the number of African-Americans or anything. I noticed, and the staff all lived in the same world that I did, that they were all very much aware of this being in the air. When I observed oral examinations, which I did fairly often as a quality control measure, it seemed to me that the examiners when they had a minority candidate who was close to the passing grade, generally would pass the interview. They were living in the same atmosphere and they knew it was important. I don't know what else to say about that.

Q: I had one very short session with the sort of newer joint exercise exam and I had a whole year where there were three examiners sitting there with a candidate. One of things that I found, but this was back in '75-'76, was that if there was woman taking the exam we always put a woman on. If there was an African American, we would put an African American on. They always were tougher. "I made it, damn it. You've got to be as good as I am and I am just not going to take any of the patronizing passing." The rest of us in a way it was there, let's give them a little break. Did you find that?

BLAKEMORE: You said several different things at once it seems to me. I never tailored the panels to the candidates in terms of demographics. It was a strict rota of whose turn is it today. I noticed that women in particular tended to be tougher on female candidates, at least it seemed that way to me. I don't think that there was much courtesy passing of either women or minorities except as I said before in borderline cases.

There is enough objectivity in the way the system is run now that you would have to have all four examiners on board with that kind of thing. If you had one who didn't like it, he'd make everybody very uncomfortable because the system is designed so you don't just say that you like this candidate. You have to like them in certain areas and you have to base that on something concrete that the candidate said. If there is no controversy most of them go very quickly and there is no discussion. But if there is a difference of opinion then you are liable to have to explain what did she say that makes you think that she is a passing candidate. I think that was good.

Q: That's very good. Tell me about pressures that you felt from lawsuits, from up above and all within the Department and outside the Department?

BLAKEMORE: I didn't get a lot of pressure, I don't think, except when a lawsuit was in progress or seemed imminent. That wasn't all that often but I found that my superiors in personnel had a great allergy to lawsuits.

I had a case with a blind candidate who, according to the Americans with Disabilities Act, was entitled to take the exam and to be in the Foreign Service if he could pass the exam. This particular man was known to be litigious because he had taken and failed the test earlier and had complained about various accommodations that we had made to help him as a blind person take the test. We really went out of our way. He passed the written exam. When it came time for the oral, I did stack the panel. Not with blind people obviously but with people that I thought were particularly sensitive and diplomatic in dealing so that this candidate would get fairness and the perception of fairness from the four people that examined him. He failed and sued the Department.

I was really dismayed. I had given depositions and was ready for a free trip to San Diego to testify in the guy's trial when the Department caved in and settled. A rather large amount of money to settle the case. I tell the story simply to illustrate the allergy to lawsuits.

Q: Did you see any correlation between schools where people were coming from and passing?

BLAKEMORE: It was very clear on the written that certain schools were strong and they were the ones that you would expect: Ivy League and some of the California schools and some from the University of Virginia. I think it was much less clear on the oral because the oral exam does not deal with knowledge at all anymore. It is strictly giving the candidate the opportunity to demonstrate that she or he has twelve characteristics which are found by research to be essential to success in the service. It doesn't matter what school you went to.

Q: Did you have any feel about some of the cram schools that Georgetown particularly has? Did that make a difference?

BLAKEMORE: I think it probably did a little. I had some dealings with Georgetown that were a little awkward for me because it seemed to me that they expected me to help them prepare people by providing excessive detail about the oral exam. That was mildly contentious. You asked before about what I had observed in terms of changing attitudes towards the career among the candidates. It was clear to me that Foreign Service candidates were no different from other young people in our society. That is, they were no longer looking for employment for their whole working life. They were looking for something they would enjoy doing for a while. It might look good on their resume when they were going to do something else. The Foreign Service is definitely on trial as well as the candidates, not only before they take the exam but after they succeed in passing the exam and become junior officers. They still very much have the Service on trial. There is a lot of resentment of that I think among older officers but that is too bad because that is the way it is going to be. We would be foolish to weed people out just because they didn't seem to be committed to a 20 year, 30 year career.

Q: And they might get trapped. One of the complaints that I hear again and again, I'm not sure if this is just an older generation looking at a younger generation, (In Ben Franklin's time, they were complaining about the new kids coming up with their quill pens) but about writing, did you find that there was a feeling that it was harder to get people to write well?

BLAKEMORE: I wouldn't have put it that way but I would say that the inability to write well kept a lot of candidates out of the Service. Based on the research of what it takes to be successful in the Service, writing is the most heavily emphasized skill. It is the only skill thing in the oral exam that is counted twice, for example.

Q: When you say the oral exam there is a writing component?

BLAKEMORE: In the oral assessment there are two writing components that are graded separately so it is given double weight. In my experience with junior officers I don't think many people write well initially in the Foreign Service staple. It takes awhile to get used to what is wanted. Q: Your feeling from the BEX is that you've got to be a writer, you're selecting writers probably more than anything else?

BLAKEMORE: Yes I think that is correct. Well it is double counted but that still makes it only 14 or 15 percent of the oral assessment grade.

Q: Was this a problem for getting minorities at all, the writing, was this seen any more there, or was it general across the board?

BLAKEMORE: I don't think that I could generalize that it was anymore of a problem with one group than another.

Q: How did you deal with the new breed of Foreign Service officer who as I always think of the retired lieutenant colonel coming in? We are talking about that it used to be that you practically couldn't be 30 years old and become a Foreign Service officer in our time. Now you bring people in, what is the age limit?

BLAKEMORE: It seems to me it was 60.

Q: Did you find that these people with their maturity, maybe had another career, did they have an unfair advantage? How did they stack up?

BLAKEMORE: I have wondered about that. I don't think that they did have an unfair advantage. I suppose that if they had been in a career where there was a premium on writing that would give them a leg up. But in a way they had a disadvantage in terms of flexibility. They saw things too rigidly sometimes. I'm not sure that I can make a generalization although I don't think the pass rate was any higher for older, experienced people.

Q: I suppose there would be a certain amount of people whose experience of being an older person would be that they tended to be reacting to their own experience rather than being able to respond to different situations.

BLAKEMORE: That's true. Also you have to remember that you are talking about an entry level salary so that a 40 or 45 year old person who is really good at some other profession would probably find it very difficult to come in at the entry level salary. If he really wanted to be in the Foreign Service he would probably do it by one of the many mid-level entry routes.

Q: Did you find yourself fighting a battle with security? One of the problems with the Foreign Service has always been that somebody takes the exam, goes through the process and we are ready to hire. Then we say it is going to take a year and a half or so to come in.

BLAKEMORE: There was a delay problem with security although they made a valiant effort to reduce the delays to about six months during my time there. I thought you were going to go somewhere else with that question. There was a problem with security occasionally in terms of what appeared to be homophobia still in place among the agents even after it was officially decided that homosexuality should not keep someone out of the Foreign Service.

Q: Could you explain what homophobia meant?

BLAKEMORE: People who did not want homosexuals in the State Department because they thought that they were by definition a security risk. That day is past but I think that some of the security investigators were the last to get the word. One of the things that I was pleased with in my tenure was that in all of the recruiting material and in the basic information packet about the Foreign Service exam and entrance process, there was the usual U.S. government disclaimer that people would be hired without regard to their gender, race and so on. I was successful in getting the phrase "sexual orientation" added to that list. I hadn't seen it in any U.S. government recruiting material before that.

Q: Did you find military people who were retiring were particularly attracted towards the Foreign Service or not?

BLAKEMORE: It was much more obvious at the Foreign Service specialist level, that is technical people, communicators and so on, administrators. Not in the officer level because again I think the salary would be too low to be attractive.

Q: Have we covered it all?

BLAKEMORE: I think we have.

End of interview